Miss Petticoats

By
Dwight Tilton

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June 27, 1903.

MISS PETTICOATS

Agatha Renier

("*Miss Petticoats.*")

MISS PETTICOATS

BY
DWIGHT TILTON,

With Illustrations *by*
CHARLES H. STEPHENS

"Before the judgment bar of God, there is no sex in sin."

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CONTENTS

The Birth of Ambition

PAGE

CHAPTER I

THE DEMON OF DISCONTENT 1

CHAPTER II

AN ANIMAL AT BAY 10

CHAPTER III

IN THE CABIN OF THE "HARPOON" 19

CHAPTER IV

"MISS PETTICOATS" 29

CHAPTER V

"BEAUTY PROVOKETH THIEVES" 40

CHAPTER VI

A WOMAN'S INTUITION 51

CHAPTER VII

MEN OF GOOD WORKS 63

CHAPTER VIII

TILLY HAS HER SUSPICIONS 75

CHAPTER IX

LOVE'S GREATEST TEST 83

CHAPTER X

SOCIETY AMUSES ITSELF 94

CHAPTER XI

'TWIXT SMILES AND TEARS 106

CHAPTER XII

AT NEW MOORINGS 116

CONTENTS

'Mid Slings and Arrows

PAGE

CHAPTER XIII

A Pirate Craft Sighted 126

CHAPTER XIV

An Idol of Clay 135

CHAPTER XV

A Rolling Stone 142

CHAPTER XVI

Phineas Sykes's Clambake 151

CHAPTER XVII

A Shattered Idol 161

CHAPTER XVIII

"God Almighty's Gentleman" 169

CHAPTER XIX

The Spirit of Christmas 178

CHAPTER XX

The Whip of Scorn 190

CHAPTER XXI

The Path of the Storm 200

CHAPTER XXII

Capt. Joel Sails Away 210

CHAPTER XXIII

A Woman Scorned 219

CHAPTER XXIV

At Hank Donelson's 227

CHAPTER XXV

Society is Scandalized 235

CHAPTER XXVI

Modern Chivalry 243

The Awakening of a Soul

PAGE

CHAPTER XXVII

After Five Years 251

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Penalty of Fame 261

CHAPTER XXIX

The Embers of Hate 271

CHAPTER XXX

A Rift in the Clouds 278

CHAPTER XXXI

For High Stakes 287

CHAPTER XXXII

A Signal of Distress 297

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Skirmish Line 305

CHAPTER XXXIV

An Ambuscade 314

CHAPTER XXXV

"To Forgive Divine" 323

CHAPTER XXXVI

Tightening the Noose 332

CHAPTER XXXVII

The Mask Thrown Off 342

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A New Dawn 351

CHAPTER XXXIX

A Debt is Paid 361

CHAPTER XL

Into Safe Harbor 369

ILLUSTRATIONS

MISS PETTICOATS . . . . *Frontispiece*

"SWAYING IN THE AIR LIKE A SCARLET VINE." . . . . . *Page 6*

"WITHIN A YEAR YOU WERE ALL I HAD." . . . . . *Page 38*

"COME NOW, LUCY; AGATHA'S A GOOD GIRL." . . . . *Page 163*

"NOW GO; MY HOUSE CAN BE YOUR HOME NO LONGER." . *Page 208*

"YET NOT TOO GRAND TO REMEMBER OLD FRIENDS." . . *Page 285*

"I SENT FOR YOU—TO BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS." . . . . *Page 330*

MISS PETTICOATS

The Birth of Ambition

CHAPTER I

THE DEMON OF DISCONTENT

THE great bell in the granite tower of old Number One mill clanged out its warning of the noontide release to the hundreds who toiled their lives away within its walls, and presently there poured forth from its gray portals and out between the smooth spaces of well-kept lawn to the iron gates a swarm of men and women, boys and girls, like angered bees from a hive. Only from this hive there came no drones, for by the grim survival of the fittest only those who could work from sunrise to sunset and from day to day, with but one gleam of blessed Sabbath light, were given place in the vast home of industry.

Like bees too, these mill people of Old Chetford were excitedly buzzing about some special thing that had aroused their ire. That was clear from the broken bits of conversation that now and again rose above the monotonous humming of the majority.

"Yes, blast 'em," cried a burly, red-faced weaver, as he stopped at the gate to wait for some of his particular cronies, "they cuts us down because the market ain't strong, they say. Bah! That's always their cry when they wants to grind us out of the little we gets already. We knows better. It's more dividends they're after, and more dividends they'll get, whether our young 'uns live like pigs or not. We ain't goin' to stand it. We'll——"

"Oh, *you'll* stand it right enough, Peter Grimes," broke in a tall, buxom girl with the flaunting comeliness of an overblown peony, "you're too fond of your gin to want to throw up your job. If you men had half the spirit we girls have got, you'd have struck long ago and taught these people with their carriages and fine dresses how to behave themselves."

"Ah," growled the weaver, his dull eyes lighted by a glint of admiration in spite of himself, "you're a young idiot, you are. What do you know about it, anyway? You think more of your Sunday night sparking down on Promontory Road than about the rights of labor. You'd better keep your mouth shut."

"What do I know about it?" replied the girl angrily, "I'll tell you what I know about it. Didn't I see that white-faced old Mrs. Copeland drive up to the gate an hour ago, and wasn't I called to the 'super's office just afterward to be jawed about flaws in my cloth, and wasn't the old skinflint sitting there talking to the rest of the bosses, and didn't they stop all of a sudden when I came in?"

"S'pose they did?"

"Well, what happened in a few minutes after that? Oh, yes, you begin to get something through your thick head, don't you? They posted up a notice in the main hall that seeing as they were so poor and we were so rich, they'd decided to make a ten per cent reduction in our wages all around. Now, who's the heaviest stockholder in the mill; tell me that?"

The man's red face flushed to a deeper hue as the full significance of this revelation dawned upon him.

"You're a smart girl, Bess; it's Mrs. Copeland as has done it, sure enough. And here's her hosses and monkey coachman comin' back after her. We'll wait right here for her ladyship, and just tell her what a nice old woman she is, and how we all love her."

On the magical wings that rumor always wears the news quickly went through the excited crowd that now surged around the gates. The author of their trouble was a woman; she was rich; here was her carriage with its prancing horses at the curb; she herself was coming out in a minute or two. All the accessories for hate were before their eyes, and they forgot their hunger and weariness in their desire to stay and share in the denunciation. The murmurs of discontent grew to vindictive snarlings and then to loud threats of violence.

If the tall and rather stately old lady who walked briskly down the steps and on toward the crowd realized that she was the object of all this turmoil, she gave no sign. Her face lost its customary severity as she bowed and smiled at some of her ac-

quaintances among the mill people, moving straight at the mob as if she expected it to stand aside in recognition of her birth and station.

Moral and physical courage in combination form a magnificent and sometimes irresistible fighting force, but in a contest with the mob-mania they must often go down to defeat. So found Mrs. Sarah Copeland as these turbulent waves of human passion closed about her. She had sometimes bewailed her own femininity as partially shutting her out from many of the larger affairs of life; now she knew that it alone might save her from great bodily harm. She struggled on toward her carriage.

The yells of denunciation, the hissing, the unlovely epithets that were hurled at her in full cry by the women hurt her pride more than did the physical indignities. That she should be publicly reviled in her own city, the city of her ancestors' love and hers, was worse than blows.

"Give us back our money; give us back our money," screamed a fragile slip of a woman, worn to a shadow amid the everlasting clangor of the shuttles.

"Yer're a pretty Christian, ain't yer?" roared a fat and blear-eyed slattern, shaking a ponderous fist in the aristocratic face, "takin' the bread out of our children's mouths, you old miser." This woman had no offspring of her own, but she filled the void in her life by an exceedingly great devotion to a certain grocery of unsavory repute in Old Chetford.

"Oh, yes," taunted the peony-faced girl, "that

nephew of yours is quite expensive now, isn't he? You want to raise a little something from us to pay his bills with, of course. I know him, you see." And she laughed significantly.

Such were some of the solos in the furious chorus of opprobrium that assailed the gentlewoman's ears. She had ceased trying to find her carriage now, and stood with folded arms looking scornfully at the nearest of her tormentors. Her calmness and her silence angered the crowd to desperation. Violence would surely be the next vent to its fury.

Suddenly the crowd in front parted a little as the stalwart figure of the coachman tore its way to the beleaguered lady. It was in just such emergencies as this that James found his former career as a prize-fighter of practical value. He was eminently respectable now, and never referred to the decently buried past, but as his fist shot back and forth with the well-trained regularity of a piston, he blessed the memory of his old master, Jem Mace, and never stopped to count the victims he laid low.

Grasping his mistress unceremoniously around the waist, James dashed back toward the carriage, surprising the mob into non-resistance by his prowess and celerity. He pushed the lady into the vehicle—for which he apologized most respectfully afterward—and prepared to mount the box and be off.

A well-directed stone from someone in the crowd hit one of the horses squarely on the flank. Both animals sprang forward violently, throwing the coachman to the ground. With the frantic un-

reasoning of their kind they swerved from the street and made directly for an open space ending in a precipitous bank, below which bristled an ugly array of spiles, the remains of an old pier now left uncovered by the outgoing tide.

As the unharmed but sadly disheveled James picked himself up his quick eye saw at once the possibilities of a terrible catastrophe. He could not reach the horses himself, he knew; he could only pray for a miracle to happen.

Then he saw a young girl, whose flashing red skirts he never afterward forgot, dash out from the crowd, plunge across the path of the animals and jump for their heads. He closed his eyes. Is she dead, he wonders. He looks again. No, she has caught the bit-rings of one of the horses and is clinging desperately to them, swaying in the air like a scarlet vine.

And then—victory! The girl's sheer weight brings the animals to a standstill, panting and snorting with fear. A window of the carriage is lowered and a calm face looks out, the face of his mistress, who is unharmed. He goes to his horses and soothes them into a normal condition. Then he himself becomes calm, and the prize-fighter is forgotten in the impassive coachman.

The heroine of this adventure would have made her escape, but it was not so written by the fates.

"Come here, my girl," said the occupant of the carriage so imperatively that the former could do no less than obey.

"Closer yet, my dear. I am very short sighted."

"Swaying in the air like a scarlet vine."

A lorgnette of gold was raised to the gray eyes, and through it was seen a charming picture.

"M'm, yes; a good face. Who are you?"

"My name is Agatha, ma'am."

"Agatha? Well, Agatha what? There is another name, I suppose."

"Agatha Renier."

"M'm, yes; a foreigner, eh? Who's your father?"

"My father is dead."

"Your mother, then?"

The girl's bright face lost its sunny smile.

"She is dead, too."

"Well, in goodness' name, who *is* there?"

"There is grandfather and me."

"M'm, yes; where does he live?"

"On board the old whaler Harpoon at Tuckerman's wharf."

"Indeed? A sailor, I presume."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Come closer."

The girl, with a little blush, yet in no wise unconscious of her own good looks, did as she was told.

"Yes, a really good face; but don't get vain over it." The shrewd old eyes took in with one swift glance the shabby scarlet skirt. "Poor, I see. Yet," as she noted the piece of fine ribbon that put a dash of color to the dark hair, "yet proud."

Agatha raised her glance valiantly to this strange old lady's. She had lost all her timidity now, for she had been told that she was poor and proud. She

knew that she was poor, and she would show that she could be proud.

"My grandfather is a captain," she said, with all the impressiveness her youthful voice could summon up.

"Captain what?" asked the lady, curiously unmoved by the importance of the disclosure.

"Captain Stewart."

"M'm, yes; I've heard of him. I'll see him. You've done me a service to-day, my dear. You must be repaid."

The girl flushed rosily now, and her pretty lips were set firm. "Poor and proud; poor and proud," was the refrain that kept ringing through her very soul.

"I don't want any reward," she said brusquely, "it was nothing that I did—nothing that anyone couldn't have done. But," she continued with an odd little smile, "you may pay for the tear in my dress, if you like. That will do for me."

The aristocrat gazed at the daughter of the people with keen curiosity for a moment. This type of working girl was new to her. They had generally been obsequious, grasping, deceitful. A trace of emotion stirred a heart not often given to sentiment, at least of this personal sort.

"Tut, tut, child," she retorted, "you scarcely know what you have done, and you certainly do not know what you are saying. You are in a bit of a huff, my dear, that's all. But lest you forget it, I am going to tell you again that you are poor and

proud, as proud as—well, never mind. Home, James."

Furious with anger as she was, Agatha watched the beautiful carriage roll up the street until it turned a faraway corner and was gone. Then she slowly turned her steps back to the mill.

CHAPTER II

AN ANIMAL AT BAY

AS Agatha Renier walked back to the scene of the tumult that had brought so startling a vista of wealth and all its possibilities before her, she felt a great longing to be done with the never ending tasks in the grim fortress of toil she had now known for several years. She had seen many a fair and blooming girl transformed by the pitiless process of work into a pallid drudge. Only last night she had looked into her little round mirror at home with a sort of dread lest she herself were going the way of others.

"Tell me the truth, glass," she had said, "no flattery, mind."

She had laughed, yet with a sigh of relief, to find how reassuring was the answering message of the shining circle. It had told her that her finely-molded oval face was as delicately tinted over its olive surface as ever; that her skin was of that satin texture that speaks of perfect health; that her brown eyes were as limpid and brilliant as a pool on some rocky ledge; that her dark hair waved with its usual saucy abandon around her low, smooth forehead; that her full lips were of the same hue as the little coral trees in her grandfather's quaint cabin-room. All was eminently satisfactory in this regard, and,

being a very human young woman, Agatha had rejoiced in her own beauty.

"I'll do for a while yet," she had told her mirror and herself. Why she should not "do" at sixteen might perhaps not have been clear to other auditors; but Agatha's was a life that made for a sadly brief childhood. In those days of Old Chetford's industrial history babies, almost, were pressed into the ranks of the providers, and as they stumbled on with tired little feet, they became old before they were fairly young.

She herself had not been put to the toil under compulsion. Her grandfather's bit of property realized enough for the two to live upon, at any rate, and the old man's pride in the pretty child, with her alternating moods of storm and sunshine, had made him determined that she should grow up a "lady."

She went to the public schools, where she was the delight and terror of her teachers. She acquired knowledge with surprising avidity, and with equal aptness gathered to herself all the inherent mischief of the schoolroom. She invented the trick of dropping a pinch of soda into some enemy's ink-well, and laughed at the horrible black eruption that would flood the hated one's desk. The tender ministrations of the ferule chastened her spirit not at all. Once, however, she was summoned before the awful presence of the "committee" for some specially heinous breach of discipline, and only the rugged eloquence of Captain Stewart saved her from expulsion.

That incident sobered her in a marked degree.

Blows upon the hand she could endure with a smile, and count herself something of a heroine; but to be turned out of school—that would be a public disgrace and a bitter blow to her pride. With that fear hanging over her head she managed to preserve at least an appearance of good behavior.

When Agatha reached her thirteenth year the leaven of unrest began stirring within her. She was now old enough to realize the poverty of her grandfather. There were little girlish luxuries she craved, and she saw but one way to get them. That way was the common method of the friends of her vicinity: work in the mills. She saw the visible benefits of such employment, without at all appreciating the dull grind demanded as the price of obtaining them. Her decision was soon taken.

There had very nearly been a scene when Agatha ventured to inform her grandfather of her resolution—as near as the gentle old man's love for the girl would permit. In vain he had protested that they had enough, that Agatha would belittle herself in such surroundings, that she would grow up without education. She had keen and ready answers for every objection, and she triumphed.

But her view-point had been gradually changing as she had grown older; she had caught glimpses of another life up on the "Hill," where Old Chetford's whale-oil magnates had established their noble mansions, and where their descendants still lived in the luxury of great estates. She began to hate the mill as the barrier that, in some indefinable way, kept her from the better things of existence.

As she went towards the gloomy old building, thrilling with her recent experience and speculating as to what the strange old woman's last words might mean, Agatha felt that her days in the factory were at an end. She would find something else to do, something that would bring her into contact with men and women of another class; and as with her a thing thought of was as good as done, her spirits rose and she began to sing snatches of a gay little French song she had heard somewhere.

The mob that had been cheated of its fair game was still standing sullenly around the gates as Agatha approached. Grimes, the weaver, was mounted upon a box and was haranguing his fellow workers, so that the girl joined the crowd practically unobserved.

"I tells yer," the orator was shouting, "if we don't do something now we're slaves for the rest of our lives. It's cut, cut, cut with these rich folks. Now they cuts off our meat; bimeby they'll cut off our clo's, after that our roofs and then——"

"Well, what then, Peter?"

The question was asked in a strong, rich voice, evidently trained to the addressing of people. The questioner was a young man of middle height dressed in gray tweed, and wearing a soft black hat with a rather jauntily curling brim. A brown moustache drooped over a pleasant mouth, and a pair of clear blue eyes spoke of an honest heart and a hatred of sham. A small white necktie gave the new comer a clerical appearance not at all in keeping with his general make-up.

"Well, what then?"

The oratorical Peter stopped short in his speech, and nodded rather shamefacedly to the man in tweed. The others stood aside respectfully and allowed him to come close up to the improvised forum.

"The parson," went around through the gathering, and with that announcement all the turbulence of a few moments before was stilled completely.

The Rev. Ralph Harding looked about him for an instant, his keen eyes picking out the faces that were familiar. Then a peculiarly attractive smile lit up his face, a smile as of indulgence for bad children.

"Now, then, Peter, what's all this rumpus about?" he asked cheerily. "I'm surprised to find you mixing in any disturbance, and you, John Hanson, and you Margaret Evans. Why all three of you were at the reading room last night, and a better behaved trio I never saw. What's started you into mischief again?"

"It ain't us as has started it," declared Grimes doggedly, "it's the owners, Parson. They've cut our wages down ten per cent."

"Ah, that's bad."

"Bad? It's worse than bad, sir. They put the notice up half an hour ago."

"And what happened then?"

"Well, sir, we learns that old Mrs. Copeland is the one that's chiefly done it, and when she came out a little while ago we just told her what we thought of her, and then——"

"Then you stoned her horses, you idiots, and nearly killed her into the bargain. I saw the whole

of it from across the street. Do you know who Mrs. Copeland is?"

"We does, indeed, Parson. She's rich and owns a big lot of stock in the mill."

"But perhaps you don't know that she started your reading room and coffee house and pays its expenses every day in the year; or that she owns that little hospital down on Water street, where you and your children can be treated without paying a cent. And you stoned her horses! I'm disgusted with you."

The burly workman lowered his eyes before the clear gaze of the minister. For the first time in his life shame and regret were struggling within him to find utterance. The others looked sheepishly about, apparently seeking some shelter from the indignation of Mr. Harding. Grimes felt that it was incumbent on him to proffer an apology.

"Well, sir, of course we didn't know anything about that," he said, "and bein' as them's the facts, we're sorry for what we done. But all the same, our wages is cut, and we've got to do something about it. It's hard, sir, that's what it is."

The clergyman's heart relented. He had a genuine regard for many of these people, and he well knew the bitterness of some of their lives.

"Now, men—and women," he added, with a courteous bow, "I am going to see what can be done about the matter. I can't promise you anything, for it may be that it is a case of reduction or a shutdown. I know that these mills did not pay one cent of dividend last year; your income from

them was more than Mrs. Copeland's. I don't believe that the owners would willingly grind you down without reason. You must never forget that they are too dependent on you to make you their enemies foolishly. I'll do the best I can for you, you may rely on that."

"We does rely on it, sir, and thanks you hearty," and then the weaver called for three cheers for the "Parson," which were roared out lustily by the same throats that had a little while before been reviling a woman. The trouble at old Number One was over, for the present at least.

As the minister turned toward the mill door he caught sight of Agatha Renier behind one of the gate posts busily engaged in pinning up a long rent in her cherished red skirt. It was a very charming sight, and if the Rev. Ralph Harding's blood stirred somewhat at seeing it, who was there to say him nay? He was young and he was a man—that he had always insisted upon, in the pulpit and out. It had gained him the reputation of being "eccentric," for which he cared as little as for the natural ebb and flow of the tide in Old Chetford harbor. He conceived his mission to be the saving of souls and the helping of the body; and he believed that whether he did his work in solemn black or rough and ready tweed was a matter of small consequence to the Almighty.

"A brave girl, as I have always thought," he said to himself as he entered the mill; "a brilliant girl and a beautiful one. God help her to go the right way."

Agatha, having finished her impromptu tailoring to her own satisfaction, started down the street for a walk during the few remaining minutes of the noon hour. This time she was not unobserved, and the crowd, provoked by its mistake in the assault on Mrs. Copeland, and smarting under the rebuke of the minister, seemed determined to make the pretty young girl the scapegoat for its own misdeeds. In this the women were the active spirits.

"Spose yer think yer a heroing."

"Goin' to get into company on the 'Hill'?"

"Puttin' on such airs, the wharf rat! Did yer ever?"

"Grandpa's 'Miss Petticoats'!"

"Oh, Miss Petticoats!'" came the sneering chorus, "Ya-ah, Ya-ah!"

Amid such jibes Agatha walked haughtily along, giving no sign of the fire of wrath that was being kindled within her heart, until at last, someone more bold than the rest, seized her by the shoulder and pinched the tender flesh viciously. Then she backed up against the mill-yard wall and faced her tormentors like an animal at bay. There was warning enough in her compressed lips, her heightened color and the nervous writhing of her fingers, but the nagging crowd was too intent upon its business to see it.

"*She* put on airs," cries one of the girls, "why she doesn't even know her father."

"And as for her mother——" sneers Bess, the peony-faced, "why——"

Before the sentence can be completed Agatha, in

a fury of passion, springs upon the larger girl and tears her face till the blood streams down her coarse cheeks. It is like the darting of a panther upon a sluggish beast of burden, and the others retreat in terror. The luckless Bess falls on her knees and protects her face with her arms.

No one else cares to try conclusions with this handsome young champion of her family honor, and she smiles scornfully down on the defeated and cowering Bess, who, sobbing with rage and pain, is trying to mop up the red rivulets on her cheeks and make herself presentable for a return to the mill.

"Don't you ever dare speak ill of my mother again," says Agatha, then turns and walks slowly to the next corner. No one follows her.

Once out of sight of her routed enemy, her repressed passion again bursts forth and angry tears fill her eyes. Then she is moved by a sudden determination, and, turning her face toward her floating home, she hurries thither as fast as her feet can carry her.

CHAPTER III

IN THE CABIN OF THE " HARPOON "

THE most picturesque and interesting feature of Old Chetford at the time of the foregoing events was that legacy from its glorious past, the wharves where once flourished the whale-oil industry. For years they had been slowly going the way of all things temporal, decaying, withering, tottering to ruins, or else remodeled and covered with tall and ghastly sheds for the storing of prosaic coal.

Grass now flourished on most of the piers where once the work of many men had coined fortunes from the golden stream of the refining cauldrons. The rows of long disused casks had become the playhouses of children; great iron pots lay around in lazy, sprawling attitudes as if enjoying their cessation from labor; clumsy old anchors, whose flukes had often caught the ground under arctic seas, rusted away in solitude under the sun and the storm. Cats and bats made their homes in the long low buildings that had been the pride and joy of Old Chetford's former magnates. But even time could not wholly destroy the dull odor of the oil-soaked timbers, and on pleasant days many an ancient tar wandered through the deserted region, to dream of his youth and the stirring chase of the sperm.

The deep pathos of this dead and gone régime was found in the abandoned ships that slowly—very slowly, for they were built of almost imperishable oak—were growing old at the wharves. A dozen of these veterans of the Pacific were there in all stages of dismantlement and neglect. The once-famous names of the Old Chetford whaling fleet might still be read by careful scrutiny of faded stern-letterings, while the figureheads of women, birds and statesmen, known in their day the world over, yet clung to the bows of the ancient barks in grotesque forms of decrepitude. Some of the hulks still boasted masts and spars, but from most the serviceable material had been stripped away, leaving them mere floating tombs of dead ambitions and decayed grandeur.

Tuckerman's wharf, although disused, and the last berth of one or two of the whalers, was neither unkempt nor decaying. Evidently someone's care had kept the planking in a reasonable state of security, had fought down the weeds, and had given the approach to the water a fictitious air of the conducting of business.

Evidently, too, someone had expended a deal of attention upon one of the old craft tied up at the southerly side of the wharf in order to get the winter's sun. Its sides above water were painted black, and its deck was as clean and fresh as if holystoned yesterday. It had no masts, but a trim flagpole was fastened at the bow, and from its top the flag of the Union fluttered bravely in the soft spring breeze.

In the CABIN OF THE "HARPOON"

Over the companionway of the after cabin a neat awning was stretched, and a pair of comfortable-looking chairs under it spoke of human occupation. On the stern the name " Harpoon " was bright with gold-leaf on raised wooden letters.

On this particular day the chance passerby at the head of the wharf might have heard the rollicking strains of an old sea ditty trolled forth with more energy than strict regard for harmony; had he stopped to listen, there would have come to his ears the sound of boisterous laughter issuing from the " Harpoon's " companion-way. The voices now and then cracked, and the laughter died away in a wheezy chuckle, like the sound of the sea-mew; but at any rate the noise was human and distinctly cheerful in that place of memories.

So thought an odd little man who happened to reach the entrance to Tuckerman's wharf just as a particularly loud shout of merriment flung itself out upon the air. He stopped and listened attentively.

The odd little man was a living enigma. His figure was very small, trig and youthful, and his every movement was agile and boyish. A tiny black round-topped glazed hat was perched over his chubby face, with its rosy complexion and small features, and he wore an abbreviated blue jacket whose sleeves seemed perpetually on the point of shrinking up over his elbows. His white flannel trousers were skin tight until they reached the knees, from which point they descended to his neat enamel shoes in a cataract of baggy folds. His grizzled hair was plastered

down in the schoolboy style of half a century ago, and from this possession alone could his age of about fifty be approximately guessed.

Hank Donelson felt that something unusual and probably attractive was going forward in the cabin of the "Harpoon." He walked slowly down the wharf, then paused. Shaking his head thoughtfully, he retraced his steps toward the street, when a burst of laughter that put to shame any of its predecessors smote his ears. With a strange little smile that just lifted the corners of his mouth, he turned for the last time and, running briskly to the gang-plank of the "Harpoon," quickly made his appearance in the cabin.

A rousing chorus greeted Hank's entrance. "Ahoy, there, shipmate," "Hello, my hearty," "Drop anchor, you lubber," and other phrases of the sea told him how sincere was the welcome, and as through the fumes of tobacco smoke Hank's nose could detect the genial odor of grog, he was minded to make himself thoroughly at home.

Without answering the salutations of his cronies, Hank walked to the head of the table where a giant-framed, white-haired old man was sitting, and, taking a hitch in his trousers, stood at stiff salute.

"I begs to report, Cap'n."

"Ay, ay, Hank, my boy," said the fine old fellow, "join the mess."

Whereupon Hank proceeded to the pipe rack made of whales' teeth set in the shell of a huge sea turtle and chose his favorite clay. He filled it with

very black and damp tobacco and began to smoke contentedly.

"Avast there," roared a fat, oily-faced tar, whose fringe of encircling white whiskers made him look like the astronomical representations of the sun, "D'ye think it's right, Cap'n Stewart, to let the young 'un smoke?" It was Captain Phineas Sykes's pet joke to treat Hank as a very small boy, who was allowed to mingle with his elders as a special privilege.

A shout greeted this sally, to which Hank paid not the slightest attention.

"And as for grog," squeaked a weazened ex-whaler who rejoiced in the name of Artemas Slickersley, and who had been one of the finest "cro's nest" men of his time, "as for grog, why in course the boy ain't a goin' to get any of that pizen."

"Looky here, Artemas," retorted Hank, "if I was so durned old as you be, I'd set about lookin' arter the salvation of my immortal soul instead of settin' round drinkin' rum and makin' fun of my betters."

"Come, come, boys," protested Captain Stewart, "no quarreling now, or you'll have to up anchor and scud off. But Hank, how happens it you're here? Didn't you say yesterday you were going to take down a stove for Tilly to-day?"

Tilly was Hank's maiden sister, whose love for her vicious old parrot was only exceeded by her contempt and hatred for the "shiftless old gabbers," whose club was the after cabin of the "Harpoon."

To Hank she was not a pleasant topic for discussion, and he shifted uneasily in his seat, as if he half expected her grim face to appear in the companion-way.

"Well, to tell the truth, Cap'n," said he guiltily, "I *did* sorter promise to take down that stove, but Tilly sent me out to buy some bird seed, and as I was goin' along I heard the boys down here, and—and here I am. Brown sugar in mine, Cap'n, thanky, and not a very powerful lot of water."

At this auspicious moment Hank, as the newest arrival, was introduced to a frank and hearty young man who commanded a coasting schooner hailing from another port. As the nephew of Captain Sykes he was received with a certain amount of respect and consideration, but he was made to feel that he was not and probably never could be the exact equal of the men who scoured the northern seas for whales three long years at a time.

"How do I happen to be living in this ship?" said Captain Stewart, in answer to the young sailor's question. "I'll tell you, lad. For twenty years I commanded the old 'Harpoon,' and I got to be part owner in her. Those were the days when five hundred ships hailed from this very port, and the catch was worth fifteen million dollars a year. Think of that, my boy. I was in a fair way to be rich, when all at once somebody struck the cursed kerosene in Pennsylvania, and that was the end on't.

"We couldn't believe for a while that whaling had got its death, and I kept on in the 'Harpoon,' till there weren't any market nor any price for the

stuff I brought home. 'Twas the same with all of us; the whales got scarce, and the whalers got scarcer. Then the mills came in, blast 'em, and the old oil firms were snuffed out. There weren't no more to do, and we quit.

"Well, by and by I came in from my last v'yge with the good old 'Harpoon' and tied up here at Tuckerman's wharf. The others took the spars and rigging and other stuff for their share and I took the ship, for I loved her like a wife. I made a home here for 'Aggy' and me, and here, please God, I'll stay till I'm piped to quarters up aloft."

The old man's voice trembled impressively as he finished his little story, and he made a vain pretence of mopping his forehead to hide the moisture in his eyes. Old Artemas accurately took in the situation, and to relieve the emotional tension of the moment gave the call:—

"Pipe all hands to grog."

After this order had been duly carried out, someone suggested a "yarn." Nobody volunteering, the men drew lots with some little yellow shells in a tin box. The smallest appeared in the big hand of Captain Sykes, and that worthy cleared his throat vigorously, took a pull at his "grog" and plunged into his favorite story.

"Wall, messmates, 'twas in eighteen fifty-seven when the good ship Mozambique, of Nantucket, Cap'n Simms, master, was in lat'tude forty-four, long'tude hundred'n sixty-five an' a half. We had four hundred bar'ls aboard, an' was headin' sou', sou'east for the Horn, a-thinkin' of home an' the

babbies, when all to onst the man in the cro'nest sings out:—

"'Thar she blows!'

"Then I goes aft to the quarter-deck, an' I says to Cap'n Simms, 'Cap'n Simms,' says I, 'thar she blows. Shall I lower 'er?'

"Cap'n Simms says to me, 'Mr. Sykes,' says he, 'the wind's a blowin' right too peart, an' I don't see fit for to lower 'er.'

"Then I goes for'ard, an' pretty soon the man in the cro'nest sings out:

"'Thar she blows an' belches!'

"Then I goes aft, an' I says to Cap'n Simms, 'Cap'n Simms,' says I, 'thar she blows an' belches. Shall I lower 'er?'

"But Cap'n Simms says to me, 'Mr. Sykes,' says he, 'the wind's a blowin' right too peart, an' I don't see fit for to lower 'er.'

"Then I goes for'ard, an' 'fore long the man in the cro'nest sings out:—

"'Thar she blows, an' belches, an' *breaches,* an' SPERM AT THAT.'

"Then I goes aft, an' I says to Cap'n Simms, 'Cap'n Simms,' says I, 'thar she blows, an' belches, an' *breaches,* an' SPERM AT THAT. *Now* shall I lower 'er?'

"Cap'n Simms says to me, 'Mr. Sykes,' says he, 'blast your eyes, I told you twic't afore that the wind was blowin' right too peart, an' I didn't see fit for to lower 'er. But if you want to go on your own *re*sponse, why lower 'er, and be durned to you.'

"Then we lowers the boat, an' I stands up in the

bow, for I was all creation on the long dart. We rows up to the critter, an' I lets drive, an' it *tuk*.

"Then we kills the animile, and tows it back to the ship. Thar on the quarterdeck Cap'n Simms was a-standin' with tears as big as hickory nuts a-rollin' down his cheeks.

"'Mr. Sykes,' says he, 'you're the best fust mate that ever sailed on the Mo-zam-bique. In the locker in my cabin there's rum, gin, whiskey an' terbaccker. They're yourn for the rest of the v'yage.'

"'Captain Simms,' says I, a-drawin myself up as haughty as a dook, 'I don't want your rum, nor gin, nor whiskey, *nor* terbaccker. All I want is ci-vil-i-tee, and that of the gol darndest cheapest brand.'"

A roar of applause greeted Captain Sykes's narration of how he had "put down" Captain Simms, who had been known in his day as a "hard man." Then a song was started to the effect that although Jack had "a gal in every port, the home gal's the one for me."

The weather-worn choristers were startled in the middle of one of their most telling cadences by the sudden apparition of Agatha Renier in tears and a torn dress. She dashed past them without a word and entered her own little cabin, the door of which she shut with a bang.

The visiting mariners looked at each other and then at Captain Stewart. Evidently there was to be no more jollity on the "Harpoon" that day.

Old Artemas was the first to find words:

"Squall, eh? Better run for port, hadn't we, Cap'n?"

Their host nodded. "Yes, messmates, that's about it. I'll have a little patching up to do, and you wouldn't care to be here. Some other time we'll finish that song."

The little company dispersed, only the faithful Hank lingering on some pretext, in his great desire to be of service; but on the gruff order to be off, given with an assumption of jovialty by the captain, he too, disappeared. The old man sat down in his favorite chair.

"Aggy, dear," he called gently, "come out here and see your grandfather a minute."

The door slowly opened, and the young girl appeared. Then with a swift movement she threw herself on her knees at her protector's feet, sobbing pitifully.

CHAPTER IV

"MISS PETTICOATS"

THEY formed a curiously contrasted pair, this massive, white-haired man who might have been likened to a mountain crag crowned with snow, and the lovely girl, undeveloped as yet but still giving pretty promise of rounded womanhood. The one, in his more than threescore years and ten, had seen many lands and sailed all seas; the other had never ventured far from her little cabin, and the circle of her world was enclosed by the blue waters of Curlew Bay and the green uplands around Old Chetford.

Now as the old man bent a kindly arm around the girl's sob-shaken figure, he gazed at her with a great tenderness born of long ministrations. In his big heart had grown the love that partakes of the maternal, though never was a manlier man than Joel Stewart. In his eyes often gleamed the fire of righteous indignation and an indomitable will, where others than Agatha were concerned. The old salts well remembered his days on the quarter-deck.

"Cap'n Joel? Ay, a good man to ship with if ye're ballasted right an' keeps true to yer compass; but a devil if yer shirks yer duty," was what they said of him around the wharves and offices.

Agatha, with a little petulant gesture, shook off the encircling arm, and seated herself on a bench. Affectionate as she was, she had lately conceived a distaste for "babying," as she called it. Her love seemed to be kept more in reserve, just as her eyes showed depths of purpose that were not to be sounded by the ordinary plummets of human nature. She dried her tears resolutely now, and looked steadfastly at her grandfather.

Captain Stewart had often seen that look of mysterious concentration on her face, and had wondered what it might portend, but until to-day he had never feared for her future. Up to this time her childish griefs, though many and often tumultuous, had always been banished by tender words and comforting caresses. But now her burst of passion had in it something of maturity, something not to be dispelled by a kiss. He realized that the great and wonderful change from girl to woman was beginning.

And this change he dreaded with all his heart, for in the opening process he thought he saw something of Agatha's fascinating, brilliant-minded, yet reckless and weak father. As she sat gazing into his eyes, her nervously intertwining fingers showing the agitation she was attempting to conceal, the old man was sure he traced a resemblance to the one who had inspired the only deep hatred of his life. He shuddered at the discovery.

Neither spoke for some time. "Come, come," the captain at last said tenderly, "what's the matter with

my little girl? And a shower, too? Tell me all about it, Miss Petticoats."

"Don't, grandfather," she returned, with a sudden upflaring of passion, "not that name to-day."

"And why not to-day, Agatha?" queried the old sailor in much bewilderment. "What has happened that your old grandpa mustn't pet you?"

"They would laugh if they heard you."

"They? Who? What 'they' is there for us to mind?"

"The girls at the mill. They taunted me with my red dress and this ribbon," and she snatched the dainty bit of silk from her hair and threw it impetuously on the floor.

"Why, I'm sure they're very pretty," faltered her grandfather.

"Pretty!" echoed Agatha scornfully, "yes, they *are* pretty, but what right have I to wear them? A 'wharf rat,' they called me."

"A wharf rat? I don't understand."

"You would if you had heard them jeer at my home—'water-soaked old hulk,' they called it."

"But it *is* our home, Aggy, our own," and here was the first suggestion of age in the tremulous voice. "You have been happy here, haven't you?"

There was pathetic anxiety in this question, an appearance of dread lest he should hear some terrible news.

"Yes, oh, yes, indeed," returned the girl earnestly, with a lingering glance about the cabin, with all its familiar nautical odds and ends, and into her own

spotless little room in the stern of the ship, "who wouldn't be happy with such a dear old grandfather and such a love as he has for me." And Agatha fairly flew to the old man, clasped his seamed neck with her warm arms and passionately kissed his silvery hair.

Then, indeed, the old cabin glowed with light and love and joy for the big-hearted mariner; he wanted no better thing in life than this girl's trust and affection.

"I thought you were, my dear; I thought you were," he said, "but I began to fear just now. You didn't care for those taunts? You love the old ship as I do, do you not, dearie?"

Again Agatha emphasized her feelings with a kiss.

"Then what was it started the storm, little one? Tell me all about it."

In a few swift sentences Agatha described the trouble at the mill, the attack on Mrs. Copeland, the panic of the horses and her share in averting an accident. As she pictured herself clinging to the bit-rings and dangling before the legs of the runaway animals, Captain Stewart's lips muttered a prayer of thanksgiving that this day was not to end in the blackness of despair.

Then the eager girl, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, told of the rich old woman's attentions and questions; how she had said she was coming to see the master of the "Harpoon," and how—most remarkable of all—she had said that Agatha must be rewarded.

"Not that I wanted or would take any reward," said the pretty narrator naively, "but of course I couldn't help wondering what she meant."

The story of her return to the mill, of the minister's rebuke of the crowd and of the insults of Big Bess was quickly related. Agatha freely confessed to the scratching of her tormentor's face, and, when gently reproved, spoke in broken, almost whispered accents of the slurs upon the memory of her mother.

"And I know I have nothing to be ashamed of for her, have I, grandfather?" she concluded earnestly.

"No, child, nothing," returned the captain gravely. "Those who may say you have either do not know the facts or speak through malice. See here, Agatha."

Thus speaking, the old man took down from one of the upper bunks along the side of the cabin a beautiful little sandal-wood box, neatly inlaid with figures of mermaids and flags, the work of his youthful days on shipboard. Even Agatha had never been permitted to peep into its mysteries. Unlocking the casket, he drew out a thin gold locket, and opened it.

"There is the face of your mother," he said.

Agatha gazed long and silently at the miniature of the fair-haired young creature who smiled so innocently from out her encircling gold. A world of tender thought and wonderment dwelt in the daughter's deeper eyes as she kissed the picture.

"I knew she was good," she said at length, with a sigh and an affectionate smile.

"It is for you to keep now," said the captain, "I have long cherished it, but it rightfully belongs to you. Never part with it, and always remember to defend her name, as you have done to-day. Would you like to hear why you may always defend her name?"

"Yes!"

Only one word, but that word filled with a depth of intensity that told the old man that the hour had struck.

"Ever since you were born, Aggy," he began gently, "I have known that some day you must hear your mother's story, but from year to year I have put off telling you, partly because you were too young to grasp the full meaning of its sorrow, and partly because I did not wish to cast the least shadow on your happy girlhood. But somehow you've stopped being a girl to-day, and besides you've heard something that makes it my duty to speak.

"Twenty-two years ago, my child, your mother was the light-hearted, happy girl whose face you now see. She had never caused us a single tear. She was purity itself and the soul of honor and truth. All her emotions were on the outside, for she hadn't the depth of your little heart, my dear. But she loved us well, and we were proud of our child and hoped for a bright future for her.

"One day there came to Old Chetford a French nobleman who had been driven out of his country for a time—Adolph Renier, Count Fornay. He

was on a visit to some of his countrymen here, and he brought with him his son François. The younger Renier was a man of handsome person, gracious manners and fascinating ways.

"At some social event—for we Stewarts were well considered in those days, Agatha—he met your mother, and was charmed with her prettiness and simplicity. He pressed the acquaintance in headstrong French fashion, and your mother—well, how could she help being attracted by such a man? I saw that she was losing her heart, and determined to put an end to things before it was too late.

"I called on the Count and told him what I feared. He smiled and said that it was only a passing fancy on his son's part, that it would amount to nothing, and that in any event a marriage with my daughter would never be recognized by himself or his family. I told your mother a part of this, and entreated her never to see him again.

"But I didn't tell her all," continued the old man, with a sigh. "If I had, she might have been spared much suffering. But then," he added, with a bright smile, "then I shouldn't have had you, dear.

"I'm afraid I didn't count on the waywardness of young blood as I should, for one day I came home to find a letter from your mother telling me that she and Renier had been married over in Mill River. I went there and found that everything was straight and legal, and that your mother was the wife of Count Fornay's son.

"Well, dear, I tried to put the best face on every-

thing then, and when my Alice went away to France with her husband I gave them both Godspeed and hoped for good things to come."

As this story proceeded, Agatha's dark eyes glowed with the fire of romantic enthusiasm. She the daughter of a high-born father! This was ample repayment for all the little wretchedness she had undergone that day. What an armor against the petty slanders and innuendos of a crowd of factory girls; she longed to face them with her new knowledge, but she would bide her time. Some day she would speak, and the world, which to her was Old Chetford, should know her right to mingle with the proudest families of the aristocratic town.

Thus the simple child reasoned, little dreaming of the mountains of prejudice that must be removed before a slander can be brought to bay and scotched in its den.

"For a while I got letters from France," the old man went on, "telling at first of happiness and pleasure. After a bit they grew fewer and fewer, and those that did come had a tone of disappointment and sorrow that nothing could hide. Then they stopped altogether.

"About this time I came to live in the old 'Harpoon,' and for several years after your grandmother's death I was here all alone, except for the daily visits of Hank—God bless him.

"I was torn with anxiety, and wrote again and again to France, but no answer came. 'Twasn't *her* fault, as I found out afterwards. Finally I de-

termined to go over myself, and find my girl. I couldn't bear the terrible uncertainty any longer. I packed up a little kit, and set the date when I would start.

"The night before I was to leave the ship—Hank had promised to stand watch until I came back—it was black and stormy, but I paced the deck thinking of Alice and wondering if I should find her alive. So near she seemed, even after the years, that I almost fancied I could hear her call.

"'Father!' seemed to come out of the darkness.

"I turned to go below, a big lump in my throat, when again that cry:—

"'Father!'

"It wasn't imagination, Agatha. I rushed forward and caught her in my arms—my dear girl come back to her old father with her heart broken and her strength all gone. She fainted dead away, and I brought her down here, kissing her white face and calling her all her old pet names.

"Next day she told me everything: how her husband had made a pretty plaything of her for a time, and then had tired of her and turned into his old life of dissipation; how he had neglected her and had at last openly insulted her by flaunting around with a vile woman—he even brought her to his home once, the villain; how he had finally cursed her and told her that their marriage was not recognized in France, and that she was no better than—well, Aggy, I won't name it before you. At that she left him forever.

"I swore by the Almighty that I'd go to France and kill him, but she showed me how foolish it was to think such things, and brought me back to reason.

"Six weeks after she reached home you came into my life. Within a year you were all I had."

Agatha's eyes filled with tears, no less at the history of her mother's ruined life than at the pitiable appearance of her grandfather. To see that giant frame shaken with emotion and that fine head bowed with grief was new and strange and terrible. She would have comforted him in her childlike fashion, but she instinctively felt that his sorrow would best wear itself out.

Presently his old kindly smile came back.

"And so, 'Miss Petticoats,' you know the whole story except how you really got that name. Your mother used to fondle you, and call you 'Mon petit cœur.' I didn't know French then, and asked her what she meant.

"'My little heart,' she said, and I laughed and told her that 'Miss Petticoats' was as near as I could come to the jargon, and 'Miss Petticoats' you've been ever since."

"And I—oh, think of it—I hated the name when you spoke it a little while ago," said the girl gently; "I shall love it forever now for *her* sake."

"And when you grew old enough to hold a needle, the name seemed to fit you, for you know how you have made clothes for yourself from your mother's dear old finery. Your knack of making pretty things was not from your mother, for she could never learn to sew well."

"Within a year you were all I had."

"Is it from—him?"

"I fear so, dear, but let us trust that it is all. You *will* be a good woman, Agatha?"

"If I can," returned the girl in musing, faraway tone. She was not thinking of the future; her whole impressionable soul was filled with the romance of the dead. She rose without more words and went to her cabin, holding the precious miniature to her heart.

But the captain's thoughts were all of the days to come, as he sat alone smoking a comforting pipe. The irrevocable past was buried long ago. Agatha was his world now, and her coming life a mystery he dared not attempt to solve.

But of one thing he was certain: the girl could not grow to womanhood in this fashion. Something must be done, and the kindly old man pondered long and earnestly upon what that something should be.

CHAPTER V

"BEAUTY PROVOKETH THIEVES"

MRS. SARAH COPELAND'S mansion on Bristol Street was one of the notable houses of a notable avenue of great estates in which the people of Old Chetford had an intense pride. They had been told that they possessed the handsomest residential thoroughfare in New England, and they needed no encouragement to believe it. Bristol Street was the main artery of the upper city, the channel, as it were, of the blue blood of the oil magnates' intensely self-satisfied descendants.

From the region of cotton mills on the north to the tossing waters of Curlew Bay on the south it stretched its long, beautiful course, bordered on either side by deep lawns, tree-dotted and not too closely shaven, rising gently to the houses of stately size and architecture that had been built from the treasures of the sea. The whaling princes had believed in room and air, and most of their holdings were little private domains in themselves.

The street was more like a succession of country seats than part of a busy city, and there was a grace and courtliness of life among the owners of these splendid properties that come by a sort of divine

right with the inheritance of ancestral homes and fortunes.

In former days Bristol Street had merged on the south into Promontory Road, a magnificent sea-scented drive of several miles around a picturesque point that stretched out into Curlew Bay. On its extreme tip was an abandoned fort of the Civil War period over whose grim ramparts and grassgrown top could be seen the lovely blue of the Queen Bess Islands, while, further to the westward, the vision lost itself in the impenetrable curve of the open sea. Here was the one fashionable drive of Old Chetford society, where, on pleasant afternoons, the nabobs, their wives and their daughters were wont to bow ceremoniously to one another and thank providence that they had had considerate ancestors.

But now the glory of Promontory Road had in a great measure departed, for straight across the favorite path of the rich had been erected a barrier of huge and bleak cotton mills with their attendant brood of hideous tenement houses and sorry-looking shops. To reach Promontory Road the squalor of factory life had to be met and passed, and the hatred of the old families for the all-conquering cotton was deep enough without being intensified by actual contact. So the region of the point slipped away into shabbiness and neglect, and the few daring ones who had established residences on the Road, expecting it to become a fashionable district, flew back in a panic to Bristol Street or into the new residential quarter to the westward—anywhere to be rid of the spectre of manufacture.

Mrs. Copeland's house was a very fit abode for the lady herself. It was stately rather than beautiful, being built of stone and having a front of immense granite pillars, which, under a dull sky, gave it the appearance of a temple rather than a dwelling. The half-circle driveway was lined by elms planted by the lady's grandfather, while a tall hedge of hawthorn almost shut the beautiful lawn from the sight of passers-by.

Back of the house were orchards, graperies, gardens and hothouses, and a stable built of the same solemn stone as the mansion. Everything bespoke wealth, but wholly in the minor key; the owner would as soon have worn diamonds by daylight as to have permitted any shrieking ostentation about her dignified premises.

A detestation of sham exuberance was one of the chief articles in Mrs. Copeland's creed of life, and it was that hatred that had led her into the opposite course of concealing kindly feelings under a rather gruff and cynical exterior. Experience had taught her that the manifestly tender hearted are generally considered fair game by impostors, and, though she could well have taken care of herself in any event, she did not propose to court the trouble of warding off attack by inviting it.

Her charity and good works were not of common knowledge or public trumpeting, for she was not the sort of good Samaritan who stops the world by the roadside to show what he has done. She gave to deserving need in her own way, and scarcely confided

to her little finger when her thumb and forefinger dived into her purse for some helpful object.

"Um, yes," she would say to her friend, the Reverend Ralph Harding, "commend me to those philanthropists who frame their wills to make a newspaper monument to themselves, who want to establish an everlasting chorus of public praise after they're dead. As for me, I'm not going to leave money to help fat trustees get fatter. I shall give what I give while I'm alive and able to see that the money goes where I want it to. Those who try to help themselves I'll help, too, but no nutrition of pauperism for me."

The custody of this unconventional woman's large property, hers partly by family descent and partly by inheritance from her husband, who had died fifteen years before, was vested supremely and solely in Sarah Copeland herself. She had long been versed in all the unfeminine mysteries of finance, and her money had grown like the traditional snowball. She knew the stock market also, and not to her sorrow, for she was cool, calculating, shrewd, unemotional in all her dealings. Her operations were sometimes on a scale that would have astounded her neighbors of Old Chetford, had they been taken into her confidence, but only Ralph Harding knew much about her business life. They had been thrown together in charitable work, and from the very first, the woman liked the man's honesty and lack of cant.

"Mr. Harding is the only minister I know who doesn't seem to imagine that he's the one man who

has actually been selected by the Lord for the kingdom of heaven," she once told somebody, who promptly repeated it, to the great scandal of other eminently devout clergymen in town. She liked him because she believed that conscience guided his conduct of life and not the opinions of others.

Shortly after noon of the day that had brought Agatha Renier and Mrs. Copeland together in so unusual a fashion, a slim, fashionably dressed young woman ran lightly up the stone steps of the house in Bristol Street, and rang the bell. A hatchet-faced, preternaturally solemn butler opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Copeland in, John?" asked the lady.

"Not at present, ma'am, but she's expected soon. Will you come in and wait?"

"No, I think not. Tell her that Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh called, please.'

She turned to go, but the sight of a tall, well-knit and manly figure coming up the driveway evidently caused a reconsideration of her intent.

"On second thought, I think I *will* wait, after all," she said, and entered the house. "No, not there, John; the drawing-room is so formal"—with a little pretense of a shiver—"I prefer to wait in the library."

"Very good, ma'am," returned the well-trained servant, with just the suspicion of a shrug from his thin shoulders. With the utmost ceremony he ushered her into a restful, beautiful old room finished in dark walnut, from whose walls looked down the choice spirits of genius.

Now Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was not a literary

woman, nor yet noted for her love of books, but she picked up a Darwinian treatise that chanced to be on the library table, and began turning its pages nervously. Even John, the butler, seemed to understand that she was somewhat out of her accustomed sphere, for he asked with well-bred insinuation as he paused behind her chair:—

"Anything further I can do, ma'am?"

"Nothing, thank you. When Mrs. Copeland returns, please let her know that I am here."

"I will do so, ma'am," and the butler closed the door noiselessly, the shadow of a smile flitting over his gaunt face. That evening below stairs he almost became cheerful, and avowed to his chosen confidant in that region of accurate family histories that "Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh is a reg'lar deep 'un. She wanted to wait in the library this afternoon, instead of the drawing-room. I took a look at the book she picked up and pretended to read, for I allus likes to know the tastes of the aristocracy, and bless me if it wasn't upside down."

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, having no manner of suspicion that her little artifice had not been accepted *in toto* by John, the butler, waited till the door was closed before she threw the book impatiently upon the table and then arose to pace restlessly from fireplace to window and from window back to fireplace again.

She was undeniably a pretty picture in her agitation. Masses of reddish hair were piled high on a shapely head in the mode of the period, and the cream and pink complexion that is the compensation

for such tresses was saved from insipidity by a pair of lustrous gray eyes that sometimes darkened to violet. Her mouth was large, but finely curved, and her nose thin and well-shaped. It was not a common face, nor was its owner easily placed in the catalogue of temperaments, except that one would have readily believed that under the stress of emotional abandon she would go to almost any lengths.

Her husband was a middle-aged lawyer of sober habit and judicial turn of mind. He had succeeded admirably as the legal adviser of great corporations, and the money he made was freely turned over to his pretty wife to give her the luxuries she had enjoyed as a girl and to help her ambition to become the leader of Old Chetford's fashionable set as Mrs. Copeland was the acknowledged head of the older régime. He loved his wife deeply, but he was too engrossed in his profession to study her daily life critically, even had he been disposed to do so. It was enough for him that she was an ornament to his home and a woman much sought after and admired.

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's unrest increased as the minutes passed. "He will surely come here," she said half-aloud. Then she caught sight of her own fair reflection in the great gilded mirror over the marble fireplace.

"I am not changed for the worse, am I? Of course not," she asked and answered in the same breath, as she studied her features more critically. She saw her rare beauty and was satisfied. How could she detect in her own face that something,

spiritual rather than physical, that might have been called repellent?

She heard a familiar step in the hall, and with a little deepening of her rose-leaf coloring she dropped into a chair.

The man for whose coming Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh had waited with such agitation was a fair-haired, well-favored young fellow of perhaps twenty-four or five, with an aggressive bonhomie and a rough and ready style upon occasion that made him popular among his inferiors. Being Guy Hamilton, and Mrs. Copeland's only nephew, he considered his status in the world as quite secure, and he took that world as his own particular oyster, to be opened with a golden lever. In this process he obtained all the pleasure that could possibly be extracted.

Guy plumed himself very highly upon what he called his "adaptability." Through the rather grandiose functions of the true Old Chetford aristocrats he could and did move with a species of chivalric grace that was quite effective, especially with women. He could pass to the other extreme, and with equal facility make himself one of the people, thinking their thoughts and sharing their amusements—some said dissipations.

As he came face to face with Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh in the room he had come to consider almost his own, he raised his brows in well-bred surprise. But his greeting was conventionally polite.

"Why Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh—don't rise please—I scarcely expected to find you here; but it is a pleasure to see you anywhere," he said, with the

smooth ceremony habitual to him when in the society of women of his world.

The large gray eyes flashed fire.

"If it is such a pleasure, *Mr.* Hamilton, I am surprised that you have deprived yourself of it so long. Since when have you taken to denying yourself any self-satisfaction, however small?"

"Come now, Lucy, don't sneer, that's a good girl. It hurts me and doesn't improve you."

"Ah, you do remember my name, after all!"

"Remember your name? Really, why shouldn't I?" he queried with a light laugh.

"Your formality, somewhat unusual in private as you will admit, would indicate that you had forgotten, and forgotten other things beside a name."

"There, there, Lady Imperious, be your own sweet self." and with the flourish of a cavalier he raised a little gloved hand to his lips and kissed it.

"But Guy——"

"Now, now, Lucy, don't scold. I'll admit I've been beastly unsociable, but the fact is I've been deucedly busy, and——"

"Busy! *You* busy!" A smile of scorn, of incredulity, of fast-rising temper curled Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's handsome mouth into something not at all attractive. "I fear I shouldn't care to know the business you have been engaged in for the past month or two."

"By George," cried the imperturbable Guy, "I wish Parks could paint you with that expression. Queen Elizabeth—royal wrath—all that sort of thing, you know."

"First you neglect, and then you ridicule me," she retorted passionately. "I—wonder—who—she is."

"She! What she? What are you talking about?" queried the man in astonishment, real or affected. The woman wondered which.

"The 'she' who is keeping you from me. If I knew, I believe I'd—kill her!"

Despite his rule never to be troubled at anything, Guy felt a very unpleasant sensation about his heart at the words and the hardened features of the woman he had thought he knew so well. Evidently he had but just begun to reach the depths of her nature.

"By Jove," he said with a low whistle, "I almost think you would."

"If I didn't actually," she went on swiftly, "I would figuratively—she should be made to suffer."

"But there is no 'she' at all," he protested earnestly, "at least, no particular one. I can't be a woman-hater, you know, and shun them all. Don't you see that it would make you too noticeable?"

"What do I care?" she asked fiercely.

"Well, I do. I must protect you, if you will not protect yourself. Think of the meddling fools who would delight to toss your name about. And there is Aunt Sarah; when she looks at me with those eyes of hers sometimes I imagine she knows the whole story. I *must* conciliate her. She is especially Quixotic just now, and I have to play Sancho Panza to her. Charming role for Guy Hamilton, isn't it?" he added with a grimace. "But you know, Lucy" —he changed his tone of levity to one charged with

all the pathos he could summon up—" whatever expectations I have in the world are fixed in her. It is only the lack of money that keeps us from never parting."

A tenderly wistful look softened the face of this woman who had just been uttering the fiercest threats.

" If I could only believe you, Guy Hamilton," she said.

" Don't talk of ' belief ' between us two," he returned soothingly, " of course you may."

" But you have—have loved," and the speaker seemed to choke over the word, " so many women."

" But that was before I met you," he whispered tenderly.

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh seized one of his white, handsome hands with both hers and held it passionately to her cheek for a moment. As for Guy, he was on the point of giving the lady some further reassuring token when the sound of wheels was heard on the driveway outside.

" Aunt Sarah," said he, striding to the door with the vigorous alertness that was part of his fascination for women, " she's getting out now. Pull yourself together, Lucy, for she's got an eye like a hawk."

He stepped into the hall, and in another moment the visitor heard his voice in an almost caressing tone:

" Aunt Sarah, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh is waiting to see you. She is in the library."

CHAPTER VI

A WOMAN'S INTUITION

AS Mrs. Copeland entered her library accompanied by the solicitous Guy, whose gallantry toward his aunt was as correct as his mode of dress, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's quick perception noted that she was not her usual cool and collected self. Her hands trembled a little as she removed her black bonnet and her mouth twitched noticeably. After greeting her visitor with something of stately ceremony—she always reserved her curt and broken manner of address for those she liked and trusted the most—she rang for her butler.

"A decanter of port, John; that '47 in the further cellar."

She drank a little of the wine, and under its genial influence began the story of her adventure.

"The brutes," exclaimed Guy sympathetically at the recital of the assault upon her by the mill people.

"M-m, well; not quite that, I think. Do you expect them to draw fine distinctions when they are confronted by the hard fact that ten cents is to be stripped out of every one of the few poor dollars they grind from their wretched lives? How would you like to have your allowance cut down a tenth? Perhaps I'll do it as a lesson in economics."

Guy shuddered at the bare suggestion, made with

grim humor though it was. Already he was harassed by demands he could not meet, and he had seriously considered asking his aunt for an income "more fitting for a man in his walk of life," as he had proposed putting it.

In terse but picturesque style Mrs. Copeland described the flight of the frightened horses and the bravery of the mill girl who had stopped them.

"Just think of that slip of a thing dashing out and clutching a pair of runaways by the bit," she went on with enthusiasm, "and hanging on like grim death till they halted! Of course I called her to the carriage and had a little talk with her."

"What was she like?" asked the melodious voice of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, who had been greatly interested in the story. "Was she pretty?"

"M-m, well; yes. Pretty enough for her own good, I should think. But that wasn't the chief thing about her."

"What, then?" queried Guy, in a politely bored tone.

"Pride. Hot, passionate pride. The kind that will carry her to a brilliant future or to destruction."

"Destruction, most likely," observed Guy, "it's the way of the breed," and the debonair man of the world thought he had good reason to know whereof he spoke. The "breed" was to him a pretty species of game in whose preserves he thought himself entitled to poach with impunity. If his snares resulted in disaster sometimes, there were ways by which the facts could be kept from too wide publicity. He believed thoroughly in the efficacy of the guinea to

"help the hurt that honor feels," and he prided himself on the fact that no one could call him parsimonious in dealing with such matters.

"I'm not so sure about that," returned his aunt. "Unless I'm very much mistaken, that same pride of hers will bear self-respect as one of its fruits."

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's animated face showed that this discussion was quite to her liking. She seemed to desire to continue it, which filled Guy with impatience.

"But you say you spoke only a few words to the girl," she persisted. "How could you get such an insight into her character in that little time?"

"My dear, you belong to a class of society taught to wear a mask to fit every occasion; you mustn't forget, however, that there are those who don't study your books. On the faces of the untutored you can read the soul."

Guy swallowed a glass of wine, and, after a suave apology, lit a cigar. He blew a ring or two into the air with graceful deftness, and then lazily returned to the skirmish.

"Not always a safe guide, I'm afraid, Aunt Sarah. You remember that handsome servant I had last winter. His face was a regular church certificate of moral character, and I'd have trusted him with the Bank of England. As I didn't happen to have that, all the fellow got away with was my new overcoat and some silver souvenirs. I repeat that it isn't safe to judge by appearances."

"Depends a good deal on the judge, Guy," retorted his aunt. "You were never noted for your

perspicacity. And furthermore this girl isn't of the common kind."

"Who is she?" asked Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh.

"Agatha—something or other; some French name. Her grandfather's name is easier to remember—Captain Stewart. Do you know him, Guy?"

"Yes. A fine old sea-dog he is, too. White hair, big frame, red face, devil of a temper, but straight as a string. Lives in a ship at Tuckerman's wharf, and hates the cotton mills as a cat hates water."

"Amen to that," cried Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh.

"Well," said Mrs. Copeland with great decision, "I'm going to see the girl and her grandfather, and find out what can be done for her. She interests me."

If Guy had felt little enthusiasm for the newly-discovered heroine before, he now hated her as cordially as anyone unknown to him could be hated. His aunt's words filled him with apprehension. Although he had never been granted the happy privilege of seeing her will, he had long regarded himself as the Copeland heir-apparent, and had managed his affairs with that definite goal in view. Others had taken him at his own valuation, which had smoothed his career wonderfully. He had no illusions as to any speedy entrance to his kingdom, for he knew that his aunt was a vigorous descendant of a long-lived race. He was content to wait the dispensations of providence with a calm fortitude, buoyed up by a liberal allowance and the privilege of doing nothing.

But this beast of a girl that had taken his aunt's fancy by storm! Would she become

an element in a possible remodeling of the "I, Sarah Copeland, being of sound and disposing mind" document that was now resting in a vault at her bankers? He had heard of such cases, and he realized that nothing was impossible to a woman of strong temperament like his aunt. He must get to work at once, he thought, to combat any such development of circumstances. He wondered which was the best tack to take, and decided on the gently remonstrative.

"Well, Aunt," he began, "I appreciate your goodness of heart, as I have cause to do, and the girl may be all you think her, but is it quite judicious of you to lower yourself by going into questionable localities for charitable work? Can you not send her some little present that will please her fully as much as a visit?"

"Lower myself! Rubbish!" almost snapped his aunt. "Can a lady lower herself by going down to the wharves of Old Chetford on a respectable mission like mine? How can any good ever be done with such sentiments as those? If the Samaritan had waited for the wounded traveler to come to him, he would never have been immortalized in the New Testament. I am going down to see Captain Stewart at the earliest opportunity."

He had taken the wrong tack altogether, Guy realized, and he determined to run no risk of another mistake to-day. He looked at his watch with considerable ostentation.

"By Jove, I have an engagement with Claybourne at the club in ten minutes," he said, "I must be off."

And he picked up his hat and cane and sauntered into the hall.

"I, too, must be going, Mrs. Copeland," said Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh with a pleasant smile. "I trust you will soon recover from your adventure. Come and see me, do."

They walked down the path together and along Bristol Street to the corner where Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was to turn on her homeward way, the man moodily thinking of the youthful intruder into his peace of mind and the woman of the one thing that had been uppermost in her heart for days. As he stopped for an instant to bid her good-by her stress of emotion overcame her.

"Guy, look at me," she cried passionately.

He gazed into her fine eyes for an instant, then flinched before the absolute mastery of their search. Adept in concealment as he was, he found that no man can endure that kind of ordeal before the woman he is deceiving.

"*Is* there no other?" she asked tremulously.

"Now Lucy, don't be silly. You will attract attention. Of course there is no other."

With a sigh, half of satisfaction, half of doubt, she turned and left him.

As he proceeded toward the club, with his swinging manly stride, Guy mused on the unpleasant way circumstances have of taking liberties with the comfort of mankind.

"Confound Lucy," he thought, "who would ever have supposed she would kick up this sort of a row.

What in the world would she do if she knew about Louise?"

The Attawam Club was a comparatively recent institution in the lives of the wealthy younger set of Old Chetford. For years past the shipping offices and the Oceanic Reading Room had furnished about all the general social intercourse the male inhabitants of the city had enjoyed. But a new generation had sprung up that voted the musty old rooms of the latter venerable organization slow and boresome. So it came about that when the estate of a former merchant prince fell into the market his fine old residence was purchased and the Attawam Club started upon its prosperous career. With the addition of an enormous piazza for summer lounging and the more critical observation of whatever womankind might chance to pass up Liberty Street, as well as suitable alterations inside, the Attawam members possessed a clubhouse in which they felt legitimate pride. A famous old negro cook was installed as chef, and the "Committee on Bar" was always composed of men whose genius along liquid lines was undeniable. Being conducted on these judicious principles, the club had sprung into immediate popularity, and its waiting list was a long and formidable one.

When Guy Hamilton reached the billiard room he found his friend, Captain Claybourne, idly practising some fancy shots in which he excelled. The captain was a rather short, middle-aged man, with smooth-shaven face and iron gray hair which he

brushed down above his ears. He had inherited some money with which, by strict economy where economy was not visible, he managed to lead a very well-ordered existence. He held himself aloof from the hurly-burly of life, and delighted to give the impression of being a philosophical spectator of the world rather than a participator in its activities.

"Ah, dear boy," he said in his drawling voice in response to Guy's greeting, "Glad to see you so well set up to-day; I am, indeed. Shall we have a little game—with spirituous attachment?"

"Anything you say," gruffly assented Guy, in no very good humor with himself or mankind, "only I would amend by requesting that we have the 'attachment' first."

This being duly attended to, the game proceeded. But Guy was no match for his clever little antagonist, and after a badly beaten half hour threw down his cue in disgust and dropped into a big leather chair. He drew up a little club-table on which was a siphon of soda and a decanter of brandy, and prepared to make himself comfortable for the rest of the afternoon. The gallant captain took a neighboring seat.

"Claybourne," exclaimed Hamilton suddenly, apropos of nothing they had said, "do you know that women are the devil?"

The older man looked benignantly at his friend.

"My dear boy, is that a recent discovery? Don't you think it high time you found it out with all your experience? Why not learn the part of wisdom and let them alone, as I do? Because one of 'em—a

deuced pretty one, too, they say—brought old Troy to ashes, is no reason why a fellow should let 'em make cinders of him. Let 'em alone, and they'll let you alone, and then you'll have a paradise without any rotten apples."

"Who talks of paradise in the Attawam?" asked a clear and jovial voice as its owner, the Reverend Ralph Harding, swung into the room. His well-knit figure and finely chiseled face gave him the appearance of a trained athlete, and his clear eye looked like that of a man used to measuring distances as well as souls. He wore a blue serge suit and a soft shirt with rolling collar, beneath which flowed a wide, blue-dotted tie.

"Hullo, Harding," said Claybourne, with more than his usual cordiality, while Guy nodded nonchalantly, "glad to see you. I want someone worth playing billiards with. The youngster here is decidedly off color to-day. Paradise, eh? Ah, yes, I was merely remarking how the ladies brightened up this dull world of ours. Play you a hundred points, ten or no count."

"I'm yours," returned the clergyman, throwing off his coat and selecting a cue with much care. Then he lit a cigar and puffed it appreciatively.

"By Jove, you're different," muttered Claybourne. And he summoned all his skill toward the vanquishing of his unconventional opponent.

As the game progressed Guy's mood brightened somewhat; perhaps the gentle breeze that came in through the open windows laden with the incense of spring had a share in the process; or, possibly,

the little club-table may have contributed toward his greater cheerfulness, which took the form of rallying the minister.

"Should think your parishioners would raise the very deuce at your coming up here, Harding," he ventured, "club and the cloth don't jibe very often, you'll admit."

The minister laughed as he made a beautiful and difficult massé.

"Well, I won't deny that there was a little warmth in the breasts of some of my people when I joined. But they soon found that I preached just as well and helped just as many poor souls as I had before. In fact, I think I always do better work after billiards than at any other time."

The subject of billiards and the Reverend Ralph Harding had been a standing joke in the Attawam since the memorable Friday night when the faithful of the Third Congregational Church had assembled in the vestry for prayer-meeting and had awaited their pastor's coming in vain. At last old Deacon Snow had arisen and declared that he thought he could find Mr. Harding. A few minutes later the venerable church-pillar had appeared in the billiard room of the club and remarked to one of the players gently:

"Brother Harding, the meeting is waiting."

The minister, in astonishment, had pulled out his watch. It was nearly eight o'clock.

"I declare, Deacon, I'd forgotten all about it," he answered, amid a general roar of laughter, "but tell them to wait until I finish my run."

To-day, however, there was nothing to mar the clergyman's enjoyment of his game, and he played with a sure touch and an accurate eye that gave Claybourne an anxious quarter of an hour, for the captain, with all his philosophy, disliked defeat at billiards.

While the afternoon was thus wearing away, Mrs. Copeland was at the desk in her private sitting room looking over her accounts and business correspondence. The desk was a beautiful old piece of dull mahogany, come straight down from colonial days, and everything upon it was in scrupulous order. Any trifling with this sacred spot was keenly resented by its owner. There was a dark story in the servants' hall to the effect that a cat that had once invaded its precincts and upset a bottle of ink there, had never been seen again.

To-day Mrs. Copeland found unwonted trouble in going through her papers. Her eyesight seemed less keen than usual, and she had to call in the help of a maid to read a particularly illegible signature.

She was compelled to confess that the management of her large affairs was becoming a task she fain would lighten. She thought of Guy, but immediately decided that no help could be expected from him. His distaste for concentrated work would render him of little real use. And could she trust him? She disliked to say no, but dared not say yes. In her heart he was a disappointment, with his idle and careless style of living, but he was her only sister's child, her one near relative, and she kept her feeling to herself. Then, spite of herself, she

was proud of his popularity and his superficial brilliancy. But as a business confidant—it was not to be thought of.

"Bless me, it's past the time for my nap," she cried as she looked at the clock. "After that I shall be better able to reason things out."

She lay down on the great horsehair sofa and threw a light knitted shawl over her shoulders. In a few minutes she appeared to be dozing serenely.

So thought the maid who went about on tiptoe in the performance of some little task. Her surprise was great when from the lips of the cold-faced, warm-hearted old lady came this query in a tone of intense self-communion:

"If I am wrong about that girl, what is the value of woman's boasted intuition?"

CHAPTER VII

MEN OF GOOD WORKS

IN the well-filled lexicon of Mrs. Sarah Copeland's existence there was no such word as delay, once a certain course had been decided upon. Early that evening, accordingly, she went to see Ralph Harding to learn from him what he knew of Agatha Renier.

The minister's study, to which she proceeded with ready familiarity when told by the housekeeper that Mr. Harding was out, but might soon return, was a room of queer paradoxes, perhaps unorthodoxes. Tall and ponderous bookcases with glass doors lined one side of the room, the other being almost half filled by a big stone fireplace, over which a pair of fencing foils was crossed. The mantel was ornamented with a collection of mugs that would have done honor to a German student club, while still higher up was hung the beribboned oar which the owner had pulled in a memorable race when he had stroked his university eight to victory.

In a corner lay a varied pile of boxing gloves, Indian clubs and dumbbells, covered with fishing lines and odd pieces of outing clothes. The broad oak study table in the centre of the room boasted a wonderful array of pipes of all varieties and social

ranks. The exquisite onyx tobacco jar was the gift of some fair parishioner who knew that the day for ministerial slippers had long passed.

The ecclesiastical element in the apartment was furnished by the rows of black-bound theological volumes in the big bookcases, although even they were separated into squads by the gayer backs of the poets' and the novelists' works. Between the front windows hung a beautiful photograph of the "Madonna of the Chair," and just at this moment a gleam from the setting sun came from the open door opposite and touched the sweet face with a tender radiance. The illumined countenance seemed to raise the whole incongruous room into the realms of divine spirituality.

"It's all just like him," thought Mrs. Copeland, as she waited there in the evening glow. "Tobacco jar holding down a sermon, fish hooks for bookmarks in the Concordance and 'Vanity Fair' hobnobbing with Jonathan Edwards. But he's a man," she said aloud, "and when a minister's a man he can make men of others."

At this point in Mrs. Copeland's reflections a little, timorous knock at the door was heard, and in answer to the lady's summons to come in a figure entered quite in keeping with the tapping. It was a wee scrap of a girl, hatless and barefoot, with great black eyes and a tangle of tight curls not often harassed by the brush.

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Copeland.

"Please, mum," began the child, "Mrs. Brown sent me to get a book in here and to tell yer that the

minister ain't a-comin' home cos he's got a meetin' down to the Coffee House."

"What sort of a meeting, child?"

"They calls it a meetin' fer 'Good Works,' but I don't see nothin' in it, cos no works is good."

The pathetic pessimism in such a morsel of humanity interested Mrs. Copeland at once.

"What's your name, little one?"

"Susy Brent, mum, an' I works in Number Two mill."

"Poor little chick. Where do you live?"

"Nowheres, mum."

"Why, child, you must live somewhere."

"Nope. Ma says we don't live; we just don't die."

The logic of this statement was not to be controverted by Mrs. Copeland, who well knew the grim horror of some of the mill people's lives. She gazed at the little girl for some time in deep thought.

But Susy, having acquitted herself to her own satisfaction, now conceived it to be her turn to act as inquisitor.

"An' who are *you,* mum?" she asked.

"I am Mrs. Copeland—Mrs. Sarah Copeland."

The morsel was abashed, but still not to be turned from her course of investigation.

"The one wot lives on Bristol Street? The one wot's so rich?"

"They call me so."

The child surveyed the woman with the critical eye of precocious youth. Then her glance rested on the costly gloves in which Mrs. Copeland always

took such pride. She pointed to the well-shaped hands.

"Those; may I just touch 'em once?"

"Touch what, child?"

"Those—those kids."

"Why, what a—certainly, little one."

The girl crept up shyly and with almost devout admiration stroked the soft leather once or twice. Then she shrank back into her former attitude.

"Yer see, mum, I ain't never been so near a real lady before," she observed, as if feeling that her conduct was odd and needed an explanation, "an' I thanks yer very much, I does." Then, having presented a slip of paper on which was written the name of the book the minister wanted, and having received it from Mrs. Copeland, she vanished into the gathering darkness.

The Coffee House toward which Mrs. Copeland now took her way, was originally a ship chandler's shop on the water side of Harbor Street. It was the property of the lady herself, and she gave it rent free to the organization of which Mr. Harding was the head. And not only that, but she had borne all the expense of fitting up the interior and made up any deficiency in its running cost. With its well selected library, its reading room, its recreation hall and its tiny restaurant where the best of plain food could be had for the lowest possible price, the Coffee House was filling the lives of the mill people and sailors who cared to come with delights they had never dreamed of before.

Once a week there was a little talk on some topic

of practical moral value, at which Mr. Harding and many of his humble friends made brief and pointed remarks. The subject for this evening was thus announced by a placard hung on a big anchor near the door:

* * * * * * * * *
* "GOOD WORKS" MEETING TO-NIGHT. *
* GOOD WORKMEN WILL TELL *
* WHY *
* GOOD WORKS PAY. *
* * * * * * * * *

Very bright and cheerful the Coffee House looked as Mrs. Copeland turned into Harbor Street, with its powerful Liverpool masthead light hung over the door and the smaller red and green lanterns at either side of the entrance. The windows glowed pleasantly and the sound of a strong voice could be heard in regular and agreeable cadence.

In fact the meeting was well under way, and Mr. Harding was talking to the assembled crowd of the lowly. The recreation hall had been stripped of its tables, and rows of comfortable chairs put in. Mrs. Copeland took a seat in the rear and viewed the scene with great satisfaction.

The little audience that faced the speaker would have delighted the soul of a Dickens. The wan and often hopeless faces of the mill people of all ages and sizes were relieved by the bluff and rubicund visages

of sailors who formed a pleasant leaven in this mass of poverty and baffled aspirations. Some had come for amusement only, others to jeer inwardly if not outwardly, believing with Susy Brent that "no works is good." A few had been drawn in by a liking for the hearty, humanity-loving young minister and a real wish to better their conditions. They all, as it chanced, were listening intently, as most people did listen when within reach of Harding's musical voice.

"My friends," he was saying, "these are practical talks on practical matters by practical men. Men who work or have worked all their lives will show you why good works are the only works worth while. The meetings are not to be religious except in the intent to make you better men and women and children. The talks will be short and you can all understand the talkers, for they will say what they mean in simple words. They will not be orators, but I'm sure they will interest you. Between talks there will be music, and after it's all over there will be a bite of something to eat."

A ripple of applause, evidently for the final promise, interrupted the speaker at this point. He smiled, for he knew human nature, and he had seen the raiment-ripping struggles of well-born citizens when feeding time came at functions on the "Hill." He was willing to wager mentally that this collection of the humble would show more genuine politeness and consideration for one another when their "bite to eat" was ready.

The music to which the speaker had referred was

to be furnished by a big orchestrion, which, by a stroke of prophetic genius, he had bought from a circus that had come to grief in Old Chetford the summer before.

"You will readily understand," he continued, "that the music and the luncheon are not what you are chiefly invited for. You've got to listen to a few little speeches, and you've got to keep order. I'm a trifle touchy on that point. I'll have no policeman loafing around here, but if occasion requires I'll be my own officer."

In his stalwart activity the Reverend Mr. Harding looked the very incarnation of the church militant, and his audience was quick to see the man of resolute action behind the cordial exterior. Had anyone doubted his prowess, Mr. James Anderson, the Copeland coachman, could have furnished some pertinent and interesting information as to certain exercises with stuffed mittens in the stable-loft behind the parsonage.

"And now," said the minister, "we are going to hear from a man you all ought to know and many do know. He is the brave old whaler, the good citizen, the honest man, Captain Phineas Sykes."

The jolly and rotund sea-dog was hailed with a storm of approval as he arose from his seat and rolled his way down to the platform.

"Hey, ol' tarpaulin," "Bully for Whalebone," "Give us Mozambique" were some of the unconventional greetings that came from the crowd, to all of which Captain Sykes paid not the slightest heed, but cleared his throat with the sound of a small

fog-horn, pulled his fringe of whiskers and launched his address.

"Messmates and landlubbers," he began, in a tone he would ordinarily have used in shouting orders during a storm at sea, "I ain't goin' to spin yarns nor yet do any sky-pilot business. I'm here jest to tell ye what I've found to be the best thing in my toler'bly long v'yge an' that is the vally o' good works, an' good works ain't in no way possible without obejence to orders.

"When yer sure that yer orders comes from the quarterdeck an' is all right, jest ye obey 'em so well that yer messmates can see that there ain't a better man aboard ship then you be.

"Tain't allus easy to understand the why an' wherefore o' orders, I know, mates. When I was cabin-boy on the ol' bark Henry Clay nigh on ter sixty years ago, there was plenty of 'em I couldn't see the use nor the vally on. The fust mate would shout an' bellow until I thought he was clean out'n his cocoanut. But arter a while the reefs would be shaken out and the sheets made fast to the cleats an' belayin' pins, and we'd scud away under full sail at a clip no other durned whaler in them days could hold a candle to.

"I wants ter say that ye've all got yer stations an' duties on the great ship o' life. Do whatever comes to yer with all yer heart an' soul, an' yer'll be better an' happy fer it as sure's my name is Sykes. Thankee hearty for yer kind attention."

"That's the sort of thing that will do good," said Harding to himself, "it's a breeze off the ocean

right into their stifling souls. I'll push it home with a tune."

Accordingly the big orchestrion began the first mission work of its career. It had evidently not been constructed with a view to even *quasi* sacred use, for its first offering was a Strauss waltz and its second Berlioz' fiery "Rakoczky" march. But what it lacked in devoutness it made up for in volume and beauty of tone, and the minister was not disposed to cavil at its worldliness as he saw the evident delight of his people.

And now Mrs. Copeland's astonished eyes beheld the trim figure of her coachman, James Anderson, proceed down the aisle at a signal from the master of ceremonies. It was he beyond all doubt, as she saw when he turned his smooth-shaven, resolute face toward the audience.

"M-m, well; it's true that wonders will never cease. He's a good fellow; I'll raise his pay tomorrow." Thus was virtue its own unexpected reward.

It was evident that public speaking was not Mr. Anderson's forte, but he was "in the ring" as he afterward expressed it, and determined to make a good fight.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he started, choosing his words with great care, "we all must do good work if we want to amount to anything in this world. We're like horses, we are; the free-drivers get the best care and the best food and the plugs get the wallops and the worst harnesses. Of course we can't all be two-ten trotters, but even if we're draught

horses we can be good ones and be respected in the stable. We—er—that is—I don't know as I've got anything more to say."

"Go on, James," said Mr. Harding in a whisper, "you're doing first rate."

"Well, as I was saying, when we get into the ring—the track, I mean—we want to be always on the lookout to jab the other fellow on the point of the jaw—no, no, to beat all the other horses, and to land on his stomach—that is, to come in under the wire, and give the knockout—well, ladies and gentlemen, I may as well admit that I was a prize fighter once, and when I get excited all the old lingo comes back to me. But I want to tell you, just the same, that good works pay, and I know it."

"You're a liar!"

The ex-pugilist's jaws set firm and his fist clenched involuntarily.

"Who said that?" he shouted.

"I did," came the answer in thick tones, as the burly figure of Peter Grimes, the weaver, rose from a seat near the door, "an' I mean it, too."

Anderson started from the platform in a towering rage to wreak vengeance on his insulter, but quicker than he had been the Reverend Ralph Harding. Before the men in the audience had time to become excited or the women to scream, the minister seized the big weaver by the coat collar, twitched him skilfully into the hall and, with a supreme effort of strength, shot him accurately through the open outside door and down over the steps, where he fell in a sprawling mass on the sidewalk. Having thus amply justified

his assertion that he would be his own policeman, Mr. Harding calmly walked back to the platform and reopened the meeting.

After two or three more brief and picturesque addresses and a tune from the evangelized orchestrion, the "bite to eat" was set forth in a rear room, and Mrs. Copeland found an opportunity to speak with the minister on the subject that had so filled her mind.

"What do you know of Agatha—what's her name?—the granddaughter of Captain Stewart?" she asked with her usual abruptness.

"Much that is good," was the reply. "She is refined, brilliant, charming—much superior to any mill girl I know of. Her unusual qualities have interested me for some time."

"Would she make a good secretary for me? Could I trust her? How about her education?"

"I think she would be entirely satisfactory. She was nearly through the grammar school when she went into the mill, and she has read and studied a great deal since. As for trusting her—well, *I'd* trust her."

"That's enough," said Mrs. Copeland.

"But I doubt," the minister continued thoughtfully, "whether she would accept anything that savored of patronage."

"I'll smooth over all those little matters," said the lady with a smile, "besides in a year's time she will be made valuable to me if education will do it."

Then she went home under the escort of her coachman, who was secretly rather annoyed at the honor,

for he had hoped he might meet Peter Grimes on the way and have the pleasure of landing his left on some susceptible portion of that public disturber's anatomy.

CHAPTER VIII

TILLY HAS HER SUSPICIONS

NATURE was in her most tender and caressing mood as Mrs. Copeland went forth next morning in search of the good ship "Harpoon." Birds were madly attempting to sing one another down in the noble elms of Bristol Street; the air was fresh and laden with the balm of the young season; dandelions and violets and lilies of the valley ran riot along the street edges of the lawns in the far-famed Old Chetford fashion, and all life seemed to share the subtle intoxication of the drink of May.

Mrs. Copeland herself felt great buoyancy and a hope for the future. A serene night's rest had strengthened her determination in regard to the girl, and the good report made by Mr. Harding was now added to her own strong bias in Agatha's favor. She was about to pass the Rubicon, she knew, and she gloried in every firm step that drew nearer that plunge.

Even the harking-back of memory, as she passed many an object dear to her younger womanhood, was wholly lacking in that melancholy that often makes the mature woman weep for the child who was herself.

She smiled almost gaily as she went by the ancient

drab Friends' meeting-house on April Street, its square-cut dignity trying bravely to seem unconcerned at its evident loss of prestige. Time was when on "Seventh Day" the rich and powerful of Old Chetford used to throng to the spot in the sober gray so little indicative of their solid bank accounts. In the little semi-detached vestry Mrs. Copeland herself had once attended a famous school kept by a pretty Quakeress, whose discipline had been in inverse ratio to her beauty. Now the yard was dusty and unkempt, the horse-shed abandoned and the meeting-house itself almost shabby.

As she neared Harbor Street, she looked up with reminiscent affection to a little hall over a grocery store. There she had learned to dance under one of the Papantis from Boston, and there had swirled the silks and satins of the town's elect. Although it was now a cheap billiard room, and although the beefy-faced proprietor was sitting at a window in his shirt-sleeves smoking a very rank and dirty pipe, she smiled pleasantly at him and actually nodded for old times' sake, out of the exhilaration of a day in springtime and a cherished object in view.

She had some difficulty in finding Tuckerman's wharf, for many of her landmarks had long since disappeared, but at last she entered the neat gateway and stood a moment to survey the scene.

The water of the harbor was rippling merrily under the clear blue of the cloudless sky. Out in the middle the green of Harmer's Island, with its stubby little whitewashed lighthouse, filled the centre of the picture with quiet beauty, while the back-

ground was formed by the pastoral shores and trim houses of Fairport.

A few gulls wheeled lazily across the vista, and now and then a tiny tug snorted into view and out again with absurd energy. Far down to the south the air was smirched by the tall clouds of smoke from the mill chimneys.

"Thank Heaven, they haven't got up here, at any rate," exclaimed Mrs. Copeland, as she drank in the loveliness of the immediate view. Stockholder though she was in the great industrial barracks, she kept her æsthetic opinion of them in a quite separate recess of her nature.

Tuckerman's wharf seemed deserted this morning, so far as she could determine at a cursory glance. There were no signs of life aboard the "Harpoon," and the flagpole at its fore was bare. Somewhat undecided what to do, Mrs. Copeland had finally made up her mind to stroll away for a while, when a queer apparition on the end of the pier attracted her attention.

The figure was covered with reddish-brown calico, was straight as a ramrod and almost as slim. Indeed, it seemed that a strong puff of wind must inevitably pick it up and deposit it in mid-harbor. An immense blue sunbonnet surmounted the top of the structure, and its occasional nodding proved that there was a human head somewhere within its recesses.

"Gracious, can that be Agatha Renier?" exclaimed Mrs. Copeland with a shudder. Then she dismissed the thought with a smile.

"Too thin; too thin, altogether. And too stiff," she said. "But I'll go and find out *who* it is, and perhaps she can tell me something about the 'Harpoon' people."

As a matter of fact, the woman on the pier was Hank Donelson's maiden sister Tilly. Hank had outrageously and in a wholly indefensible manner disappeared shortly after breakfast when there was half a cord of wood to saw, and Tilly had steered straight for Tuckerman's wharf to hale the culprit back to duty. But for once she had been mistaken, for neither Hank nor anyone else could she find on the "Harpoon." Being of a frugal mind, and needing something for dinner, she had borrowed some fishing tackle and bait from Captain Stewart's supply, and was now engaged in enticing her next meal from the incoming tide.

She looked around suspiciously at Mrs. Copeland's approach. She had long cherished the notion that her brother Hank was a gay blade among the ladies, and she was in mortal terror lest someone, unable to resist his charms, should marry him out of hand.

"Be you a-lookin' for someone?" she asked, adjusting the neck of a clam on her hook and lowering it with infinite caution to the water.

"Yes, for Captain Stewart."

"Cap'n Stewart?"

"Likely, now, ain't it," she added under her breath. "Bet it's Hank." Then aloud:—

"Well, he ain't here."

"This is the 'Harpoon,' isn't it?"

"Yes, that's here right enough. 'Twouldn't a' been, though, ef Cap'n Joel could a' taken it with him."

"Does he love it as much as that?" asked Mrs. Copeland, with a smile.

Tilly pretended to have a tremendous struggle with a flounder which she had just pulled out of the water, but thinking the while: "I knew it; talks of love the very first stitch." Then she said:

"Yes, I 'spose you call it love. An' if he must love anything, it'd better be a ship. *That* can't talk back."

"Your experience of love must have been bitter, my good woman."

"H'umph! Don't know anythin' about it; don't want to. Never even seen much of it in other folks!"

"Indeed? But pray can you inform me when Captain Stewart will probably return, or is there anyone else who can do so?"

Tilly's suspicions were by no means allayed by this ostentatious reference to Captain Stewart on the part of this fine lady. Under the guise of solicitude about someone else she saw designs on the peace and happiness of Hank. She thanked providence that he was not present to fall a victim to feminine wiles. Then she decided to make one supreme test.

"Are you quite sure it's Cap'n Stewart you want to see?" she asked anxiously.

"Why certainly; if not, why should I ask for him?" Mrs. Copeland was getting a bit impatient at this peculiar examination.

"I dunno," replied Tilly rather helplessly, "but Aggy Renier says that one of them books she's allus a-readin' says lan'widge was given us ter hide our thoughts."

"This time speech *expresses* thought, and I do wish to see Captain Stewart," was the forcible answer.

"Well," returned Tilly dubiously, "ef yer dew, that's him a-comin' daown the wharf."

As Mrs. Copeland turned and went to meet the old man, she saw that Agatha Renier's grandfather was no common sailor. She was filled with admiration at his splendid frame and she liked his frank and honest face at first sight. She held out her hand cordially, and introduced herself.

"I am Mrs. Sarah Copeland," she said, "perhaps your granddaughter has spoken of me."

"She has, ma'am, she has, and I am proud and happy to meet you. If I can be of any service—"

"You may be of great service to me and to your granddaughter. It is about her that I wish to talk to you."

"Will you come aboard my home, ma'am? I can make you comfortable in the cabin, and perhaps show you some interesting things. And mebbe you'll smile, but I can think better down there than anywhere else in the world."

"By all means, Captain. I have heard of your snuggery down here and I want to see the whole of it. So prepare to receive a very appreciative guest."

The captain, with inborn stately courtesy, led her

across the gang-plank and they disappeared down the companion-way together.

During these proceedings the fish at the end of the wharf had been toying with Miss Tilly's bait with perfect impunity, for that lady had been watching the captain and his visitor with distrustful eyes. She shook her head ominously and registered a vow that she would not leave the premises until "that woman" had taken her departure.

She drew up her hook, from which the bait had all been stolen by thieving sea-perch, shook out her calico wrapper, adjusted her sunbonnet and marched to another part of the wharf from which she was certain to see her brother Hank should he appear while danger lurked within the cabin of the "Harpoon."

Courtesy and curiosity struggled for the mastery in the honest captain's heart as he drew the chintz covering from a rare old ebony armchair he had picked up in his voyages, and offered it with much ceremony to his guest. He saw the look of real pleasure in Mrs. Copeland's face as she surveyed the unique relics of his long life on the ocean—the beautiful and costly ivory carvings; the delicately colored shells, tinted by the magic of the sea; the great glowing branches of coral flaming out in the dim light like Siegmund's tree; all the hundred and one bits of odd and interesting things arranged by Agatha's fine sense of harmony and good taste into a whole that was most attractive. He was proud of his floating parlor and glad that a woman of culture had come to see it at last.

And he was curious—there was no denying that. Something for Agatha's advantage was in the wind, but what? Money? She would never take it, nor would he allow it. A present? That would be permissible, perhaps; it depended on the nature of it. He dared speculate no further, but pulled himself together to receive the coming proposition.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE'S MIGHTIEST TEST

THE captain's uncertainty as to how Mrs. Copeland would introduce the object of her visit was soon ended by that lady herself in her most brisk and uncompromising manner.

"Captain Stewart, I am a business woman," she began. "When I talk business I use business directness."

This was not very reassuring to the simple old man, but he decided to await developments, and not commit himself by any extended speech.

"Yes'm," he replied rather feebly.

"Your granddaughter has done me a great service; I am in her debt."

"She has told me the story; the service was nothing to mention," said the captain earnestly. "although, if I do say it, Agatha is a brave girl."

The glow of affection in the fine blue eyes found an answering of admiration in the gray ones. Each thought of Agatha in different ways, but to each she was the dominating figure of the interview.

"As I have already said," continued Mrs. Copeland, "it *was* a great service, and I must repay it."

"We are not rich," broke forth the old sailor

with rugged emphasis, "but Aggy and I do not want pay for doing our duty."

"'Aggy'? That's the girl's pet name, I suppose."

The captain admitted the fact with a bow.

"Too harsh for a pet name—altogether."

"Mebbe, ma'am, mebbe; but there's another."

"Ah, two of them? She is fortunate. What's the other?"

A shade of embarrassment passed over the captain's face as he replied:—

"Miss Petticoats."

"Miss what?"

"Miss . . . Petticoats."

"What rubbish!"

"Well, ma'am, you see 't was this way—"

Now Mrs. Copeland knew the habits of sailors. She would not have been averse to a tar's reminiscence under ordinary circumstances, but this was not an ordinary visit. So she good-naturedly cut into what she felt was about to become a long story.

"That's the way, I believe, you seafaring men begin what you call a 'yarn.' Well, I'll have it on another occasion; to-day I'm pressed for time. . . . Your granddaughter has done me, a stranger, a great service. How can I repay it?"

The captain rose abruptly at this second mention of payment, and drew himself up to his full height of six feet, two. He felt no abashment now, no diffidence in the presence of this fine lady. One of the powerful elements of his character had been

stung into action as by a rankling dart. He would put an end to all this talk of recompense, and at once.

"I have said, ma'am," said he sternly, "that the Stewarts accept no pay for freely given service. You are my guest, and courtesy demands that I hear what you wish to say, but I ask you kindly not to mention the word pay again in connection with the duty Agatha couldn't have shirked without forfeiting a good opportunity."

"Ah, Captain Stewart," returned the lady with some amusement, "it isn't hard to see where your pretty granddaughter gets the pride she cherishes so carefully down in her hot little heart. But believe me, I meant no disrespect. I am abrupt because—well, I have my reasons. I am greatly interested in your grandchild. Tell me about her."

Under the warmth of this request all the good old man's resentment melted in an instant. This rich and cultured woman wanted to know about his beloved Agatha! Why, that very request in itself was reward enough for the girl's service. He would tell her everything without reserve, tell her of Agatha's strange, yet easily accounted for, contradictions of character; tell of her devotion to those she loved, her scorn for those she hated; tell of his own hopes and fears for the girl who was now standing, but scarcely with "reluctant feet," at the beginning of womanhood.

With rude eloquence, inspired by the subject, he held Mrs. Copeland's deepest interest for nearly an hour, as he poured forth the story of his daughter's ruined life, Agatha's coming and the growth of cer-

tain traits from both her parents in her young heart. He dwelt tenderly upon her warm affection for himself, her love for the old ship, her scrupulous pride in dress and person, her newly-inspired reverence for her mother.

By well timed interruptions and judicious questions, Mrs. Copeland had no difficulty in obtaining a complete compendium of Agatha Renier's mental, moral and physical characteristics, and, making all due allowance for the strong bias of a doting old man, it was still perfectly clear that no common girl lived here in this ship.

"She works in the mill?" asked Mrs. Copeland, when at length the captain seemed to have exhausted his fountain of eloquence.

"Yes; for nearly three years now. She *would* do it."

"Doubtless," was the dry rejoinder. "Then she has no education, I presume."

"Beg pardon, ma'am," the captain replied almost indignantly, "she has a very good education indeed."

Then he explained how he had learned French from a French sailor years ago that he might read the books his daughter had brought back from Paris, and how he had taught Agatha when she was very young.

"See here, ma'am," said he proudly, as he threw back a curtain and brought to view a large collection of volumes arranged on shelves fitted into several bunks, "she has read these, every one."

"M-m, well," observed his visitor dubiously as she

noted the titles of some of these cherished books, "I should say that a few of 'em, at least, might just as well be left unread by a girl of Agatha's age."

Somewhat crestfallen, the captain tried another tack.

"Here is some of her writing," he said, "and here a lot of her sums;" as he dragged into view a pile of papers covered with arithmetical problems. "She's always been a master hand at figuring."

The time had now arrived for Mrs. Copeland to strike, and she struck deep as usual.

"Captain Stewart," she said incisively, "as a sensible man, a man of the world in a way, you must see that it is impossible for your granddaughter to grow to womanhood under these surroundings, comfortable as they are," glancing about the cosy cabin. "She is evidently a girl of great refinement, high aspirations and a deal of brilliancy, but as yet her character is unformed. How and by whom are you going to form it?"

"You are right, ma'am, I don't doubt," replied the old sailor. "I have loved her and been good to her and done what I could for her, but I couldn't be a mother to her; Aggy has needed a woman's companionship; it's been a great loss to her that she hasn't had it. A man's an anchor, but a mother's a rudder, so to say."

"I'm glad you recognize the situation, Captain. Furthermore you must perceive that the drudgery of the mill and the companionship of sailors—excellent men, I have no doubt—are not fitting for such

a girl as she. I'm not a snob when I say that she's made for better things."

"True, ma'am, true," said the old man thoughtfully. Mrs. Copeland had skilfully penetrated a weak spot in his armor, and he was now her prisoner.

"Now here is what I have to say. I want Agatha to come and live with me, to help me with my correspondence and accounts and otherwise to be a companion to me. In return she will have a home, clothing and education. Think for a moment, and then give me your answer."

For a little time the cabin seemed to swim before the sight of the old sailor. The magnitude of the offer, with its enormous possibilities for the years to come, overpowered him. He seemed the helpless victim of some terrific stroke of fate.

Finally, through the fog that seemed to surround his faculties, there began to steal the realization that all this portended the separation from his one joy in life, his pretty, loving, clever Agatha. How could a kind providence work in any such way as this?

"But, ma'am," he finally found words to say in his wretchedness, "Aggy—to leave me? And I, an old man—to be parted from her always? I—oh, ma'am, I can't do it, I can't indeed."

"Now Captain," said Mrs. Copeland kindly, pitying his distress, "you may reassure yourself on that point entirely. It doesn't mean parting at all. Agatha will come to see you often, and you can come to see her at any time you please."

" Well, ma'am, I shall not stand in my dear child's way. I'm an old hulk that'll soon be broken up; she's just ready for launching, you might say, all new and trim and taut. The hulk has no business getting in the way just as the new boat's going to slide into the water. You have my consent, ma'am, and there's my hand on't."

The lady took his big, rough paw and shook it warmly. Then she said suddenly:

" You love your grandchild, Captain? "

" I can't tell you how much, ma'am."

" Then listen to this, and never forget it: the mightiest test of love is sacrifice."

In the silence that followed on the part of both, voices were heard on the wharf above.

" I say, Aggy Renier, have you seen anythin' of my brother Hank? " came in shrill, rasping tones.

" No, Tilly," was the musical contralto reply, " I haven't, but I *think* he's up at Norton's store talking with the new clerk."

" New clerk, eh? Is he—is it a woman? "

" *She's* a woman, and a mighty pretty one, too," said the tantalizing voice, and the next instant Agatha dashed down the companion-way in her breezy fashion, and then came to a sudden halt as she saw her grandfather's guest.

" How do you do, my dear," was the pleasant greeting, and then with no more preliminaries, " I have just made a proposition for your future. Your grandfather will tell it to you."

In a very few words the old man outlined the offer that had come to her. She, too, was dazed for a mo-

ment, but as the full significance of it all dawned upon her, she broke into a passionate storm of remonstrance, threw her arms about her grandfather and implored him not to send her away.

"No, no, little girl, there'll be no real sending away," reassured the old man, "you're to come here and I'm to go there as often as we like, and everything will be as right as a trivet."

"And think carefully, my dear," said Mrs. Copeland, in her most convincing tone, "think of the advantages you will be sure to get in such a new life; you must regard your future, for there will come a time when——"

"Ay, ay, ma'am," broke in the sailor bravely, "when the last bo'sn's whistle calls the old man aloft you mean. It can't be very far off."

At this not over-cheerful conversation Agatha burst into tears, and sobs shook her body as the storm a young sapling. Then she rose defiantly and faced the two who seemed to be conspiring against her peace.

"I won't go; I won't. No one shall make me," she cried.

Mrs. Copeland looked at the captain, and in her eyes he thought he saw the request to be left alone with the weeping girl for awhile. So he blundered over to the pipe-rack and then up to the deck. And strangely enough—for the sun was still shining in a cloudless sky—he seemed to have difficulty in seeing to fill and light his pipe.

Left alone with the pretty picture of despair in the cabin, the stern, hard-faced Mrs. Copeland did a

thing that would have caused her acquaintances on Bristol Street to regard her sanity with suspicion.

She went to the side of the weeping girl, drew her gently to a seat and placed the beautiful head on her breast with the tenderness of a mother. For moments that seemed hours to both no word was spoken. But the sobs began to grow calmer, as an angry sea under a gentle rain, and, finally, they ceased altogether.

The elder woman broke the silence.

"Dear child," she said in a tone no one then living had ever heard from her lips, "do you know why it really is that I want you to go home with me? It is because my life has been incomplete since nine years ago when I stood beside the new-made grave of a girl of about your age—my only child. You are not afraid of me now, are you, Agatha?"

The tear-dimmed eyes were raised slowly. They saw that the stern features above them had relaxed into a smile that had something almost unearthly in its faraway tenderness. And seeing that, they trusted completely.

"You will help brighten an old woman's life, will you not, dearie?" was the tremulous query.

Agatha looked at her fixedly, a strange light in her eyes. Then, without a word, she softly kissed her benefactor on the cheek, and with a little sigh in which regret and happiness were mingled, let fall her head on the heaving breast that was so seldom guilty of such manifest emotion.

* * * * *

Agatha spent the evening in overhauling and furbishing up her small stock of fineries, although it had been decided that she should not take up her residence at Mrs. Copeland's until the following week.

As for Captain Joel, he consumed incredible quantities of tobacco as he sat at ease in his cabin watching the lithe young figure flitting to and fro at her task, but his pipe was often out and he made a great litter with his half-burnt matches.

Far into the night Agatha heard him pacing the deck overhead with measured tread. When the glimmering in the east began to note the coming of a new day, the captain took his stand on the prow of his beloved vessel and communed aloud with himself.

"Joel Stewart," he said, "you're a mutineer. You had sealed orders from Alice to do the best you could for her child. Now that the right course has been worked out for her by a safe pilot, you want to dispute the reckoning and steer a wild course with no compass but your heart. You mean well, but you're twisted on latitude and longitude by your affections.

"Overhaul your rigging, old shipmate, and sail the little one into a safe harbor. Remember what it says on Mrs. Copeland's chart, that 'the mightiest test of love is sacrifice.' Now turn in, you old barnacle, and when it's your watch again see that you come up smiling for duty."

Staunch old fellow that he was, he could not go to his bunk without a glimpse at his idol. As he passed

her cabin door he peeped in, and the smile he saw on the sleeping girl's face found a ready reflex on his own.

" Bless her dear heart," he said gently, " no matter how high she climbs she won't forget her old grandfather down at the foot of the ladder."

CHAPTER X

SOCIETY AMUSES ITSELF

ROBERT WORTH-COURTLEIGH came home to dinner with a pleasant anticipation of an evening of quiet literary browsing, good cigars and a big leather arm-chair in his pretty modern house on a "new" street—for Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, having inhabited one of the ancient residences until her marriage, absolutely insisted on "something fit to live in." So she had a long, rambling place with stubby towers, unexpected eaves, outjutting windows, big plate glass effects and a painfully new stone foundation marked off into weird geometrical figures by black lines of putty.

The lawn was treeless but diversified by rockeries and beds of early plants. Perhaps there was the same difference between this establishment and the estates of Bristol Street as between its fair mistress and the high-bred women of the old régime.

Worth-Courtleigh himself would have been content anywhere with his pretty wife, his library and his cigars. He was a heavy, stolid-looking man, with a face of granite and a voice that seemed a perpetual threat. He wore a short, bristling gray beard that was as pugnacious as such things could well be, and the steely glint from his greenish eyes, added to his other formidable attributes, was enough

to make the stoutest witness quake under his cross-examination.

People called him brutal in the court-room, but that was the fault of his aggressive physical qualities, and not of his heart. Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh knew his true generosity and humanity, as she had reason, for he had never spoken a harsh word to her, nor shown himself other than a gentleman in all their relations. They had drifted into a species of indifference mainly through their great divergence in tastes, although it was evident that, had she chosen, the wife might have turned the husband toward any sort of existence. She would make no such effort, nor would she attempt to fix her desires by his.

"Robert is a rock," she once confided to one of her many dear friends, "and I do not propose to play ivy to His Massiveness. My tendrils reach higher."

Worth-Courtleigh met his wife at dinner, and kissed her in his formal fashion.

"What's all this rumpus in the house, my dear?" he asked between spoonfuls of soup.

"Rumpus, Robert, I don't understand."

"Flowers, lots of candles in the music-room, general air of festivity."

"Why, Robert, it *can't* be possible."

"What can't?" he asked helplessly.

"Why, that you have forgotten that to-night we give a musicale for Madame Smyjane."

"Eh; who?"

"Oh, come Robert, don't pretend ignorance. Jane Smythe, then, if you like that better. She's just back

from Paris, and has a b-e-autiful method, the most expensive she could get, I'm told. Solfeggio says she's sure to be heard from in grand opera; and I have the honor of bringing her out. It's absurd in you to have forgotten it."

"Well, Lucy, I must throw myself on your mercy. I've been fearfully busy of late, and even have an engagement to-night with some of the mill officials."

The wife's quick instinct took alarm. She cared little for her husband's society, but his presence at such an event was another affair altogether. As a show-piece it was imperative.

"Now, Robert," she entreated, with the sound of tears in her voice, "I depended on you to help me out to-night. It's a *very* delicate affair, indeed, and you must stay in. Do cut the horrid mill people out for once, and give your wife your evening."

The charming woman who would not be "ivy" then acted very like that plant, for she went to her burly husband, and twining her warm soft arms around his neck, put her red lips up for auction, the price of which he well knew.

"Well, well," he said hastily, "I'll stay. But don't expect me to join in the idiotic talk of a lot of your guests. I'll be on exhibition as a dummy, and that's enough."

After dinner Worth-Courtleigh retreated to his library to fortify himself before the ordeal of an evening coat and society small talk.

It was Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's ambition to become the prophetess of a new social cult in Old Chetford. As she had broken away from Bristol Street,

so she had broken away from the stiff and pompous manner of the old dispensation. Being a scion of that same dispensation, she could do this with the certainty of dragging with her a part, at least, of the ancient aristocracy. She dashed into the work of entertaining with abandon. Her dinners were revelations to the descendants of the whalers and the Quakers; her dances things of beauty and great cost; her patronage of out-of-town geniuses pleasant and profitable—for them, at least.

She had begun to be mentioned in the society columns of the Boston papers, and when one gushing writer called her the "Madame Maintenon of Old Chetford," her cup of happiness was full. To give special distinction to the musicale this very "editress" had been brought down from the metropolis after a little practical persuasion, and she was even now closeted with Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh over instructions as to what names should appear in next Sunday's "paragraph." Her professionalism was completely concealed by her Parisian elegance of dress, and had she only been as successful in hiding the unkind work of time, she would have passed for a woman of thirty; in reality she was nearly twice as old.

"It is *such* a delightful experience, my dear Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh," she cooed in her vivacious fashion, "to visit your dear, archaic Old Chetford, and see the scions of an ancient aristocracy at your feet. What an inspiring thing it must be to have social power."

They had come down to the drawing-room, and

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh had taken her position beside a splendid stand of palms, cactuses and orchids in readiness to receive her guests. Behind this sheltering screen, but so close that conversation with her hostess was entirely practicable, stood the dashing journalist. This arrangement had been made for the convenience of the lady in jotting down the names of specially distinguished guests; it also furnished her opportunity for making running comments on the various persons as they entered the room.

"Who, pray, is that pert, overdressed young woman?" said the voice behind the plants, as the first arrival was transferring her filmy wraps to a maid in the hall, "rather pretty, but *would* the world cease to turn if she should happen to faint away?"

In considerable amusement at this clever word-picture of the singer—for her present affiliation with Miss Jane Smythe was for social purposes merely—Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh replied:

"That is Madame Smyjane, my chief guest of honor, the lady to whose voice you are to pay tribute at—how much per line, Mrs. Rushton?"

Nothing abashed, the woman in the background went on with her rapid fire.

"That putty-faced little man with the hair dragged out over his ears—who's he? Captain Claybourne? Fine old family? Appearances *are* deceptive. And that tall blond fellow who looks like a refined lady-killer, and—ah, there's a handsome chap for you. Gracious, I believe he's a minister; what a pity. Who is he?"

"Reverend Ralph Harding," answered Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, with little ceremony. The reference to Guy Hamilton, marvelously accurate in its intuition, aroused all her resentment, all her jealousy. In the surging contradictions of a slighted love she seemed to lose all sense of place and people. She clutched her heart and leaned for support a moment against one of the friendly palms.

Nothing of this was lost by the keen intelligence behind the screen.

"Aha," said the woman to herself, "is there something between the Apollo Belvidere parson and my fair hostess? No; he is scarcely her style. What is it, then, that has floored her so? I—have it—the big light one I called a lady-killer. M'm; I'll store that away; it may be of use sometime."

The approach of Madame Smyjane and the duty of introducing her to the rest brought Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh to her usual state of self-possession. In a little while Worth-Courtleigh himself appeared and phlegmatically went through a task he detested as thoroughly as he did his clawhammer coat.

"By George," he remarked afterward to Ralph Harding as they were enjoying a cigar in the library, "I wish Jane Smith's grandfather could come to life and walk in here, that's all. He was dirty, and always smelt of whale-oil, but he wasn't a sham."

The chatter of gathering crowds, the swish of skirts, the guffaws of the men, the little shrieks of amusement from the women, the rippling scales from the piano as someone touched it carelessly, the hundred sounds from human beings in a herd, and all

the subtle odors of refined femininity—none of these things touched the emotions of the big-brained lawyer in the least. But he knew that they were a part of the bread of life to his young wife, and he tolerated if not encouraged them.

The presentation of the singer having been duly made to the assembled crowd, about three quarters of whom had known her well since childhood, the conversation became general and little groups collected according to their tastes. A number of the professed patrons of music gathered about Madame Smyjane to obtain her views upon the noble art.

"Ah, my dear rector," she said to the Reverend Archibald Greenacre, the sleek and optimistic pastor of the St. Agnes Episcopal Church, "method is everything, believe me, in the art of singing. Shakespeare said to me in London: 'my dear young lady, you have a glorious voice, a true lyric soprano, but without my method what would it avail you?' Marchesi said the same thing in Paris. I took both methods, and, although they were very dissimilar, I chose the best of each and added something of my own. The result has pleased several managers, I may tell you in confidence. But to all I say the same thing: method is the secret of power."

"But Patti—Albani—Scalchi?" observed the divine mildly.

"Method, all method, my dear rector. Voice ten per cent; method ninety, as Lamperti said to me in Milan. But I hear dear Professor Arpeggio at the piano, and I must go and get my voice in trim, for

I understand you have all become *very* discriminating critics since I have been abroad."

At this there was a general scurry for the music room and a collecting of little knots of friends in neighboring seats. The distinguished Prof. Arpeggio, a fat little Italian with black hair brushed in the Lisztian style, was running scales and blending modulations until the company should be seated. The professor had begun life in Old Chetford as the pianist in a sailors' dance hall, but by his native talents and a keen sense of sycophancy had risen high.

At last he brought his preludes to a close with an authoritative crash. Then he plunged into the helter-skelter of a Bach fugue, theme chasing theme under his puffy little fingers with amazing rapidity. At the final summing-up chords he was applauded till his perspiring face glowed with pleasure.

After a melodious tribute from an imported male quartet to the silver moon, Madame Smyjane appeared. Prof. Arpeggio played a few rambling bars and then the "Jewel Song" from "Faust" was under way. The little Italian played the accompaniment wonderfully well, bringing out the charmingly halting and uncertain rhythm and the wild lilt of exhilaration in so masterful a fashion that the young woman could hardly have sung it ill had she chosen.

"Well, what of the new prima donna?" asked Hamilton of Captain Claybourne, in the midst of applause that was loud enough to allow more sincere

personal comment to be made with impunity. It is one of the curiosities of musical criticism that the hand and the tongue are often at complete variance.

"'Voice ten per cent; method ninety,'" quoted the captain sententiously, "consistent example of the value of her own theory."

"You're a duffer, Claybourne. I tell you she's great; we're going to hear from her, see if we don't."

From all about came murmurs of admiration and expressions of ecstatic delight. "Charming," "So soulful," "Spontaneous as a bird" were some of the spoken comments—especially near Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh. It was well for that lady's peace of mind that she could not hear other whispered opinions wherein Madame Smyjane was set down as an upstart without a voice and she herself criticized for presuming to force such a fledgling into the favor of Old Chetford.

But they all took excellent care that the singer should have an encore, which she accepted with an air of gracious condescension as if it were hers by divine right. The simple little Schubert song she gave seemed so totally out of place in that atmosphere of exotic luxury that even these not very sensitive people felt something amiss and consequently applauded more vigorously than before to relieve the situation.

All this was very delightful to Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, who was radiant with satisfaction when Guy sought her out during one of the intermissions of the musical programme. Something of the happy light fled from her face at his approach.

"So you still care to honor me?"—looking straight into his fair, handsome face—"that is publicly," she added with her enigmatical smile.

"Publicly or privately, your honor is my first care," returned Guy in his most correct manner.

Scorn and disbelief brimmed into her eyes.

"Then why have you not—ah, Robert, playing truant again? And you too, Mr. Harding. Cigars in the library, of course. Oh, you soulless men, to prefer vile tobacco to a beautiful prima donna."

"I must protest, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh," said the minister with a laugh, "your husband's cigars are very good indeed. And we could hear the prima donna to excellent advantage in the library. I'm a conventional sinner, you know, and I have come to beg absolution."

"Fact is," drawled Captain Claybourne, who had joined the group, "we are all more or less stuffed with the bran of conventionality. Somebody original comes along, punctures us with a sharp phrase or two and we are undone. There's no denying that the world is going to seed."

"But, my dear friend," objected the meek rector, "is it not possible that you yourself are becoming blasé?"

"Not at all; I'm simply part of the great world-movement, Greenacre; mighty few have escaped it, except Harding here, and our excellent and straightforward friend Mrs. Copeland."

"Ah—Mrs. Copeland," said Harding approvingly. "By the way, where is she, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh? I surely expected to find her here."

"She sent her regrets to-day; some special and imperative work prevented her coming, she said."

"My aunt has been very busy of late," volunteered Guy, "preparing for the reception of a new protégée she has discovered—a mill girl, I believe, and said to be pretty. She stopped my aunt's horses during a little trouble with the mill people the other day, and Aunt Sarah would have it that she was a heroine. Knew which side her bread was buttered on, I presume."

The easy flippancy of this remark failed to deceive one of his auditors, at least. Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's luminous eyes pierced his mask of indifference and saw his anxiety at the threat that had come into his life in the person of an ambitious young girl. Nor was she entirely alone in her penetration, for there were several of Guy's intimates who were well aware of the growing insecurity of his foothold in his aunt's house.

"How delightful for your aunt and—you, Mr. Hamilton," she said smiling sweetly. "It is always so charming to see one of high station stoop to befriend one of the rabble."

"I trust she will not repent her kindness," sneered Guy, "but I'm afraid it's like trying to make the silk purse—you know. What guarantee is there that this girl and her grandfather are not fortune hunters and adventurers?"

"I'll tell you what guarantee there is, Hamilton," said Harding in his ringing tones, "the guarantee of as honest an old sea-dog as ever lived, the guarantee of a proud and scrupulous girl, and, if that

is not enough, the guarantee of Ralph Harding, at your service."

Guy Hamilton smiled sarcastically. Although he had never been noted for perspicacity, as his aunt had said, a gleam of light was beginning to penetrate his mind. He bowed to the minister with elaborate ceremony.

"Pardon me, Mr. Harding, for wounding your feelings, and believe me I was wholly unaware of your interest in that quarter. My deep concern for my aunt is responsible for my prejudice, perhaps."

"Keep your concern for yourself, Hamilton," said the clergyman, pointedly, "you may need it."

That ended the Agatha Renier discussion, and after more singing by Madame Smyjane and a noisy performance of the Twelfth Hungarian Rhapsody on the part of Prof. Arpeggio, a dainty supper was served, typical of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh and all her belongings. Soon the good-nights were said, and a little later the guests of the recital had become its critics, according to the pleasant social custom of abusing whatever may be devised for our entertainment.

"A stupid evening," soliloquized Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh after she had dismissed her maid, and was preparing to plunge within her dainty sheets, "I didn't have ten words with him alone—I wonder if that girl, that Agatha, is really as pretty as they say she is."

"If he harms, or tries to harm, one hair of her head," thought the Reverend Ralph Harding as he smoked a peaceful pipe before going to bed, "he shall answer for it to me."

CHAPTER XI

'TWIXT SMILES AND TEARS

THE little company of gallant old sea dogs whose affections were entwined around the "Harpoon" and Agatha inclusively, would not hear of letting the great event of the girl's departure to the glorious realms of Bristol Street pass without a worthy celebration.

Their honest souls were a little puzzled as to what form the festivity should take, and it required all of Hank Donelson's superior knowledge of such things—he had sometimes acted in the capacity of extra serving man on the "Hill"—to evolve a plan befitting the young lady's conspicuous merits.

"Tell ye what, Cap'n Joel," Hank remarked in his brisk little manner a day or two before the time set for Agatha's departure, "jest you turn the ship over to me, stem to stern, an' I'll make a swarry that'll do justice to the heroing. You jest be cabin-boy fer a bit, an' I'll be master. Go aloft, ye landlubber, go aloft," and he cackled loudly at his joke.

But he did work with all the powers of his diminutive body, and the result was eminently satisfactory.

With infinite secrecy he stowed away a mass of decorations in the fo'castle, some mysterious sorts of "grub" in the galley and a quaint collection of chairs borrowed from neighboring wharfingers in

the hold. These things properly attended to, he sought Cap'n Joel on the quarterdeck. It was the day before Agatha's setting out for the Copeland mansion.

"Wheer's Aggy," he asked, in a hoarse whisper.

"In her cabin, putting things to rights against to-morrow," was the sorrowful answer.

"I orders yer to take her out ter ride."

"What, me drive a horse?" queried the captain, growing nervous at the formidable idea, "I've never hauled sheets over that kind of a rig in my life. And what's it for anyway?"

"It's ter keep Aggy out'n the way whiles I trims the cabin and gits everythin' shipshape for the party. Git Jim Brown's eighteen-year-ol' hoss, an' ye won't strike no squalls. An' don't git back afore four bells. Now be off, ye greenhorn; I'm master here."

"Do I see Tilly coming down the street?" inquired the captain innocently.

Poor Hank's important manner vanished in an instant.

"Eh—what—who—Tilly?" he inquired dismally. Then, at the captain's roar of laughter his face was o'erspread with joy and relief, and he trotted away to the fo'castle to assort his treasures.

When Agatha returned to the "Harpoon" in the early sunset, she stood for a moment on the bow of the homely old bark, tremulous with the thought of parting. A rich glow spread across the water of the harbor transformed its islands and shores into kingdoms of dreams. The girl's eyes filled with tears, more, perhaps, at the quiet pathos of the beau-

tiful scene than at the sorrow of separation. The final breaking of powerful ties was yet to come.

She smiled when Hank's head darted from the companion-way like a teal's from the water. Faithful old soul, she would some day see that he got his reward.

"Now, Miss Aggy, jest ye come below half a shake, an' give me a bit of advice on a p'int of importance. Will ye, now?" he added, rather wistfully, as he saw the girl's lingering, faraway gaze held by the faint silvery twinkle of an early star.

"Why of course Hank," she said pleasantly, dropping from her revery at the appeal. "Lead on, you dear old boy, and I'll follow you—to the keelson, if you say so."

Almost bursting with pride, the little sailor conducted Agatha to the after-cabin, and then into an ordinarily unused section of the hold amidships. She stood at the entrance for a moment filled with the innocent amazement of girlhood. Then she gave a little cry of delight.

"O-O-h, *Hank,* how lovely! You never did all that yourself!"

"Yes'm," admitted the diminutive tar, trembling with delight, "Hank Donelson—that's me—only able seaman at it; cap'n, fust mate, crew an' cabin-boy all in one. Is it—is it swell?"

"Elegant. And what is it all for? Why—yes—of course. For me; a good-by party. You bad boy to go to all that trouble. It's a perfect vision!"

And indeed an older and more sophisticated wo-

man than Agatha might have been pardoned for expressing frank admiration at the sight. From end to end and overhead the hold had been festooned with bunting of red and white, Agatha's favorite color combination. Here and there the strips were looped up by rosettes of immense scallop shells, from which hung long bunches of rockweed. A masthead light was brilliantly glowing at either end, while along the sides a dozen red and green port and starboard lanterns shone most cheerily. At one extremity was the well preserved figurehead of the old whaler "Juno," and the goddess's hair was crowned with a wreath of variegated Maytime blossoms. This was fondly supposed by Hank to typify Agatha and the honors to be paid her.

A long table was set forth as for the feast of a company of seagods. The cloth was a brand new duck sail, and the candles were stuck in shells of all sizes and hues. An immense pyramid of freshly boiled lobsters formed the centre-piece of the unique banquet-board, and high over all was suspended a magnificent stuffed gull, whose outspread wings seemed a peaceful omen to the room and those who should gather there.

Agatha hurried to her cabin to put on her bravest array for the great event, and had just emerged from the little sanctuary, soon to know her no more, when the guests began to arrive. Practically they all came at once, for they had never learned that it was a mark of distinction to be late at social festivities.

Hank, as master of ceremonies, received the com-

pany at the gang-plank with wonderful urbanity, and shouted the name of each as he or she boarded the " Harpoon."

All the old salts who had known and petted Agatha for years were on hand, as a matter of course. Captain Sykes, Artemas Slickersley and a few other of Captain Stewart's cronies were resplendent in their choicest land-togs and well greased hair. The young skipper, Captain Sykes's nephew, came, too, with frank and honest admiration for the lovely heroine of the occasion shining in his eyes.

Rev. Ralph Harding, escorting two or three of Agatha's mill friends, arrived a little later. Mr. Harding had been invited in an especially elaborate manner by Hank, who, although his literary attainments were blocked when it came to combining the letters of the alphabet, was a great frequenter of the reading-room, where he perused the illustrated magazines with all the dignity of a college professor.

All the guests paid their respects to Agatha, who stood, blushing and radiantly happy, in the after-cabin, and then——

" Smash my binnacles, ef thar ain't Tilly!" cried Hank, in dire distress, as all the visions of playing lord of the feast vanished in a twinkling. How she had learned of the celebration he was at a loss to know, but here she was, an embodied kill-joy. Probably she would drag him back to the dullness of their little kitchen. His infantile face puckered as if he were about to cry.

But, wonder of wonders, Tilly calmly descended the companion-way with an absolutely gracious ex-

pression on her peaked face. Moreover she carried a big bundle in her arms, and furthermore she greeted everyone pleasantly, and Agatha with real gentleness. The bundle, being stripped of its paper, proved to be a cage, within which perched her parrot, Nicodemus. The bird looked with wonderment at the unusual sight and thoughtfully uttered a smothered imprecation, a mental remnant of his youthful days aboard ship.

"Now then, messmates, all amidships," cried bustling Hank, offering Agatha his arm with Chesterfieldian gallantry. The little procession of honest souls passed to the gay supper-room, and so began to pass Agatha Renier from her old life.

The feast was fit for old Neptune himself. Such lobsters, all agreed, had never been made to blush for their own excellence; such chowder had never been tasted on the old "Harpoon;" such clams and scallops simply couldn't have been found anywhere else; the coffee was nectar, and as for the plum-duff with brandy sauce—well, that triumph of culinary art would have caused the fancy cooks of the "Hill" to hang their heads. And there was ice-cream, contributed by Mr. Harding.

With pipes and grog for the men came all the pent-up jollity of the evening. Hank, who sat at one end of the table in great state, pounded for order with an immense whale's tooth, and, fixing his gaze on Agatha, who was at the opposite end, thus delivered himself:

"Shipmates, messmates, hearties and all: this ere swarry—w'ich I learned on the 'Hill'—is fer us

ter show Aggy Renier what a fine young craft she is, an' how glad we be that she's a-goin' ter leave us."

"Don't be a fool, Hank," interjected Tilly severely.

"No, no, not glad she's a-goin' ter leave us, in course, but glad the little craft we all thinks such a sight on is goin' ter run inter a fine port where there ain't goin' ter be no squalls or shipwreck.

"I ain't much of a hand on wrastlin' with gab, 'specially on a great 'casion like this 'ere. I'm a lubber on speechifyin', but what I says I means, an' when I says that we all on us thinks Aggy Renier is the sweetest, purtiest an' lovin'est gal that ever trod deck, *that* I stand by till I'm broke up fer junk."

Under cover of the uproarious applause that followed his oratorical flight, the warm hearted little fellow wiped his eyes. So did old Captain Stewart, for upon him was the heaviest blow to fall. "Love's mightiest test" kept singing itself in his soul, and he knew that by the measure of his grief was measured also his manhood.

Tilly, who had disappeared during the closing portion of Hank's speech, now returned bearing Nicodemus in his cage. She hung him from one of the under hatch-rings so that he was brought into direct line of view with the stuffed gull, which he viewed with gloomy suspicion and cursed earnestly once or twice. Then he startled everyone, except his mistress, by screeching:

"Good-by, Aggy; good-by, Aggy. Good luck, good luck, good luck."

"Oh, you old dear," cried Agatha, "you taught

him to say that, and you brought him down on purpose. Oh, everyone is so kind; how can I thank you all?"

"I'll tell you, Agatha," said Harding, rising in his place, amid cries of "hear" and nautical shouts of approval from the sea-dogs, "You can best show your gratitude in your new life by never forgetting these old friends, as true as any you will ever have——"

"As if I ever could!" broke in the girl rather indignantly.

"I do not believe you will," he continued. "Then you have a duty to your new friend; see that you do it with your whole heart. Remember that the world is large and you a small part of it, and yet you may make that part of wonderful value. Be brave, honest, upright and true, and—I will not be prig enough to say that you will necessarily be happy—you will deserve to be happy, and deserts sometimes win. We all trust you and love you, Agatha; you have our heartiest Godspeed."

"Speech, Aggy, speech," quavered old Artemas Slickersley, and his demand was reinforced by the young skipper, who was by this time head and ears in love, but wouldn't have acknowledged it for the world.

"Shall I?" she whispered to her grandfather, blushing prettily the while.

At a nod of approval from the old man, she began, this child who to-night saw the whole world through the rose-colored glasses of happy anticipation.

"Dear, good friends, all of you," she said, "I am going away, but not out of your hearts at all. Oh, you will see how I shall think of you when I come into my kingdom. I shall be a great lady some day, and everyone will love me for the good that I shall do. No more taunts, no more insults; the world will be glad that Agatha Renier is living."

"Poor little girl," thought Harding, "when the disillusioning comes what a crash there will be."

"But it *is* hard to say good-by to the old ship," she continued, "I've lived here all my life and I love every timber and nail in it. You'll all come here very often, won't you, and tell the 'Harpoon' how sorry you are that Aggy has gone? And tell my dear grandfather that I shall never cease to love him and—that—I—oh, Grandpa, Grandpa!"

She broke into sobs and threw herself impetuously into his arms. He soothed her with a few words and brought her to a realizing sense of her duty to the guests. She looked about, smiling through her tears.

It was then that Captain Phineas Sykes arose to the opportunity. Dragging forth a large box from under the table, he proceeded to untie its strings clumsily and put the cover in readiness to remove at the proper time. He got upon his feet and waved his right arm at Agatha.

"Miss Aggy—Agatha Renier," he began with stentorian voice, "we old friends an', ye might say, gardeens, have seen fit for ter present ye with a gift as a 'slight token of esteem,'—w'ich they allus says in perlite society. This 'ere gift ain't much ter

brag on pecoon'arily, but our hearts is in it, Aggy, an' that ye well know."

Saying this, he pulled out from the box a big shoulder-cape of aggressively yellow fur, and waved it triumphantly before Agatha's shrinking eyes. Its hideousness was pathetic, its uselessness all too apparent, yet after the first shock the girl's warm nature rallied bravely, and she saw the love and devotion before everything else.

With a tremulous smile she thanked the unsuspecting old sailors in a few pretty words.

There were songs and toasts, and yarns and grog in reckless profusion before the evening had wholly worn away. The ditty that aroused the greatest enthusiasm was one that had been ingeniously revised so that it declared that although "Jack has a gal in every port, my Aggy's the one fer me."

At last came strong and earnest "Auld Lang Syne," and the farewells of the company. The old tars kissed Agatha, and the young tar wished that he might, but contented himself with a hearty handshake. Then, one by one, they went away, the lights were put out, and the fragrant darkness of the May night claimed the "Harpoon" for its own.

CHAPTER XII

AT NEW MOORINGS

LITTLE sleep came to the eyelids of the excited girl in the cabin of the "Harpoon" that night. A transition so stupendous, so full of promise she verily believed had never come to a young woman before, and she must keep awake to face it; she would greet the dawn of the wondrous day with all her faculties alert.

She tried to project herself into the years to come; she saw herself well-dressed, well-groomed, blooming with beauty, like some of the girls of the aristocracy she had envied. She loved good clothes, not from any birdlike desire to merely flaunt fine plumage, but because, like good friends, they were more companionable than bad. Shabbiness hurt her as something unclean. And now she would never know it more!

She felt, too, with a strange throb of gladness, that her character was to be molded by influences and persons fitted for that delicate task. She knew herself thoroughly, and now that she had heard the story of her birth she felt that she understood hitherto unaccountable contradictions in her nature. She was

old enough to appreciate the effects of Gallic blood on simple New England stock, and she saw in a new light her pride, her rash impulsiveness, her warm affections and her love of truth.

She smiled there in the dark as a typical incident of her childhood came to her mind. She was walking along Bristol Street one day with a little companion of water-front parentage. As they were leaning over the hedge of one of the great estates a lady came out on the lawn with her maid, the latter carrying a plate of tarts. Agatha was very hungry, and her eyes watched the tarts with tell-tale avidity.

"Are you hungry?" the lady had asked, attracted by her beauty and the innocent appeal for the pastry.

"Yes'm, please."

"Give the poor little girl a tart, Mary."

Agatha had straightened up instantly, she recalled.

"Thank you, I don't want any tarts now," she had said haughtily. Then, at a glance at her forlorn and disappointed little comrade:—

"Yes, I will take one to give this little girl. She *is* poor; *my* grandfather is a captain!"

Reviewing the events of the past week, she knew that she would not have gone to Mrs. Copeland's as a dependent; the mere thought fanned her pride into hot indignation. No, she was going because *she* could grant a favor, *she* could become of value, *she* could make the grand lady in a sense dependent on her. She would improve herself, truly, but in that very process she would become more and more necessary—perhaps an object of pride to her new mentor.

In the great sea of the future blazed forth one

light far outshining all others to Agatha's perceptions. It was the call of duty to clear her mother's name of every cloud, however filmy. Since hearing the story of the tragedy from her grandfather, it had become Agatha's passion to dwell upon her part in the future exoneration, until she had become a trifle morbid on the subject. She had even dreamed that her mother's form had come to her and had made her the chosen avenger of an unjustly despoiled reputation. Ah, she would carry out her part at any cost—that she vowed with all the strength of her ardent nature.

How she could become the instrument of justice for her mother she did not know, nor did she much care. She realized, however, that the higher she climbed in the social world the more crushing a blow she could deliver when her moment arrived. She prayed that the time might be delayed until she had achieved power and position; that she might not attain either, never once entered into her scheme of the future.

After all these sleepless dreams the girl fell into a dreamless sleep spite of her resolution, to be aroused late in the morning by her grandfather's knock and his cheery call: —

"Come Aggy, my girl, this is the day you set sail."

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Copeland's reception of Agatha was characteristically cordial and direct.

"My dear, you are welcome. This is your home now as well as mine. I hope you will be happy in it. When you are not, tell me so frankly."

This she said as she met the girl at the door. Hank and the captain had accompanied their idol to the very steps, bringing her few little belongings with almost ludicrous care. Nothing could persuade them to enter, however, and they immediately went down the path together, waving a final farewell.

Agatha gulped down the suspicion of a sob, then turned to Mrs. Copeland with one of her radiant smiles.

"I am sure I shall be happy in this beautiful place and with you," she replied. "And when you are not glad that I am here, tell *me* so."

"I shall, my child. Now come to your room."

To Agatha's rather exotic color sense the dainty white and blue of her chamber seemed wan and emotionless at first, yet even at that early stage of her development she recognized the perfect taste that ruled there as well as all over the house; she felt the caressing touch of the simple and old-fashioned beauty that governed the estate, indoors and out, and she gave herself up to the charm with supreme happiness.

From the dim and cramped interior of the "Harpoon" to the airy brightness of the mansion was a change that drew out all the buoyancy of the girl's nature. She sang the old French songs with a brilliancy that attracted the attention of more than one caller.

"Who *is* that girl with the delicious voice?" asked an out-of-town friend one day as the sound of a merry *chanson* came from above stairs.

"That's my new secretary, Miss Agatha Renier. She does sing well, doesn't she?"

"Like a thrush. Is she as pretty as her name and her voice ought to have her?"

"M'm, ye-e-s, I am inclined to think she is."

"Then why not exhibit her?"

"Not yet," replied the wise old woman, "you spectators might be inclined to criticize the picture as unvarnished. Her day will come, though."

Agatha's first week in her new home was busy enough, even for her extraordinary activity. First of all came the dressmaker, an object of awe and admiration. She was a fat and bustling little woman who knew where all the skeletons of Old Chetford's first families were kept, and was prone to make them dance merrily. More than once Mrs. Copeland's raised finger and pursed lips gave her silent warning that the sound of the rattling bones was not good for the young girl's ears.

The dresses themselves surprised and rather disappointed Agatha. Her convictions in the matter of raiment were of long standing and were full of that delight in the primary colors shown by the women of the Latin races. These clothes were simple, pale, undemonstrative; she feared she would look insignificant in them. But when she put them on one after the other in their completed state, she knew at once that they brought her beauty into greater prominence than ever, and gave her a manner she had never at-

tained with her mother's much more gorgeous material. This was her first lesson in good taste, and she never forgot it.

Other branches of the girl's education were entered upon without delay by Mrs. Copeland, whose rule it was to act to-day as if you were going to die to-morrow. A superannuated old clerk named Samuel Henderson, who had once been in the employ of Mrs. Copeland's husband and was now living comfortably on a pension, was engaged to give Agatha instruction in the fundamentals of business and finance, and it required very little persuasion to obtain the services of Rev. Ralph Harding for a couple of hours two days in the week in order to instil into her mind the essentials of history, biography and literature. In all of this Agatha showed a tenacity of memory, a grasp of the meaning of things and a breadth of view that fairly startled the young minister.

One afternoon their talk chanced upon Walpole's famous dictum that "every man has his price."

"Do you believe that, Agatha?" asked Harding, half expecting an indignant repudiation of any such doctrine.

"Yes, I do," she replied frankly, "only you mustn't make it merely money. I think that there is some way to reach anybody in the world and persuade him to do things he does not believe are right. Even you——"

She left the sentence uncompleted, but the depth of her gaze, full into the minister's eyes, started the course of his well-ordered blood a little and gave him a strange sense of helplessness before this strong

character. As he went home he wondered how she would have finished the application of Walpole's aphorism to himself, and in the quiet of the evening in his study that wonderful look haunted him.

With such a world of delightful novelty to occupy her, Agatha was very happy. She missed her grandfather, of course, but that fine old fellow came up to Bristol Street later in the week to see how the girl "liked her new moorings," and she had little chance to feel homesickness. The captain reported to the assembled tars that evening that everything was taut and shipshape and that Aggy sent her best love to all her old messmates and assured them that not one of them should ever be forgotten as long as she lived. Whereat a tremendous cheer shook the very ribs of the old "Harpoon," the like of which had not been heard since, in its palmy days, the gallant bark used to start down the harbor on its three year cruises to the north Pacific.

Agatha quickly won the allegiance of the Copeland servants by her kindness and lack of offensive superiority. She had the good sense to avoid familiarity with them, and she did not go to the other extreme of presuming on her position to order them about needlessly. John, the hatchet-faced butler, was made her slave by a little incident which he described in the servants' hall to an admiring audience.

"You see Miss Agatha," he related, "ain't what you might call bang-up on the way the quality conducts itself at the table, an' she knows it. So to-

day she comes to me an' she slips a dollar into my hand, an' says to me:—

"'John,' she says, 'I feel that I've been makin' dreadful mistakes at the table, an' Mrs. Copeland is too kind to correct me. Now I want you to watch me at dinner an' when I do anythin' wrong, you jest clear your throat, an' I'll see what I'm doin' an' correct it.'

"Well, she starts right in takin' her soup off'n the point of her spoon, an' I clears me throat. Then she tips up her plate, an' I clears it again, good an' loud. Then she takes a piece of bread an' butters it away up in the air, and I gives another old whopper. Pretty soon she makes so many mistakes that I sounds like a man with gallopin' brownketers, when all to once Mrs. Copeland gives me one of them awful looks of hers an' says:—

"'John, you may leave the room. If your throat is in such a condition as that, you'd better go to bed an' have a doctor.'

"Then Miss Agatha speaks right up, an' says:—

"'No, Mrs. Copeland, it's not his fault at all; indeed it's not. It's all mine. I got him to clear his throat when I made mistakes in eating, and oh, dear, I made so many that he had hard work to keep up.' An' I thought she was jest about to go off inter tears when Mrs. Copeland gives a rousin' big laugh an' everythin' ended jolly. She's a brick, that gal is."

Guy Hamilton's attitude toward the newcomer in the household was studiously neglectful and superior. His disgust for his aunt's "visionary scheme" was

limitless, and mingled with this was the ever-present fear that Agatha was a potential menace to his pecuniary prospects. Of course this feeling was never expressed; he professed the greatest unconcern as to the girl and did everything in his power to solidify the impression that she was merely engaged for a little clerical labor.

He rarely spoke to Agatha and what he did say was with a fine air of condescension. He thought his best policy was to "keep her down," as he expressed it to Captain Claybourne, who, to do him justice, had little sympathy for such a campaign, and he fondly believed he could freeze her into a sort of menial position. He little knew the young woman's calibre.

One day an incident opened his eyes in a measure. He and Agatha happened to meet in the library for a moment, and at just that particular time the door-bell rang. The butler was out and the maid far in another part of the house.

"Answer the bell, Agatha, there's a good girl," he said, with a sort of patronizing authority.

Instinctively she started to comply; then a sudden thought stopped her.

"No," she said, "I shall not answer the bell."

"And why not, pray," sneered Guy, "is it beneath you, do you think?"

"What I think is of no consequence, Mr. Hamilton; what I know is that Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh is at the door, and that you may prefer to admit her yourself."

"By Jove," he thought afterward as he tried to

remember whether there had been any meaning in her eyes as she mentioned the name of the visitor, "that girl is too sharp for her own good. And perhaps I'd better drop vinegar and try molasses. It never fails with women, never."

CHAPTER XIII

A PIRATE CRAFT SIGHTED

THE slipping away of a year and a half in the life of Old Chetford was marked by no external changes of great importance. To be sure, the electric rails had writhed their way through many of the business streets and even down to Promontory Road, but that had long been considered inevitable; Deacon Snow had built a large new stable to the great discontent of some of his co-workers in the vineyard who could not see why a deacon should have more than one horse in any event; another cotton mill had been erected, and the city was climbing into the first rank of manufacturing communities; more plate glass had appeared in the places for retail trade, and a new theatre had been constructed out of the remains of the ancient Episcopal Church on Liberty Street.

But none of these things was absolutely essential to the drama of human life in the old town.

More noteworthy was the passing to his fathers of the Reverend Dr. Evans, the pastor of the Central

Church for over thirty years. This blow was softened to the hearts of the younger parishioners of the gentler sex by the certainty that the good old clergyman would be succeeded by a youthful servant of the Lord, not long from the divinity school, and happily unmarried.

Of course the "chroniclers of small beer" had not ceased their perennial purveyings; no quiet short of the grave can bring about the stilling of gossip and malice and innuendo. Not that Old Chetford had any particular prominence in this form of diversion; it simply held its own in that human desire for unpleasant knowledge about someone else that is probably found as fully developed in an Esquimaux village as in a New England town.

The real, the momentous changes, fraught with good or evil, were taking place in the lives of men and women. The never ending building of character, the limitless circling of wheels within wheels of human personality, the births of ambitions, the deaths of hopes, the loves and hatreds of high life and low—all proceeded in due measure under the hand of fate, who neither hurries nor delays her work for all the smiles and all the tears of the world.

Agatha Renier's share in the changes of time had been very great. The bud had bloomed, and the flower was as fragrant and attractive as its early promise had given token. Childhood had stolen away into the mists of memory, and womanhood had placed its sign and seal on her lithe body.

The inevitable result of the influences of wealth and refinement were seen in her walk, her bearing,

her voice, her gestures. She seemed quite to the manner born, which delighted Mrs. Copeland beyond measure, as justifying her warmest predictions. Her "boasted woman's intuition" had made no mistake, and she gloried in the fact.

"Agatha has certainly made wonderful progress by her own inborn qualities," she said to Mr. Harding one day. "But don't you think that I, too, deserve some of the credit?" she asked, wistfully. She felt a childlike desire to be praised.

"You certainly do," he returned with his kindly earnestness, "a part no one can overestimate. Had it not been for you, I dare not think what she might, perhaps, be to-day."

Tears of gratitude came to the stern old woman's eyes. It was her most cherished pleasure to feel that she had turned the strong tide of this young life into safe and happy channels. She loved the girl more than she would have confessed to anyone, even to herself.

Agatha's mental progress had been equally remarkable. For no moment had she lost sight of her determination to become strong in mind and powerful in personality. She applied herself to her studies with immense energy, choosing, so far as she was allowed, the things that would make her "amount to something."

All the practical elements of finance and business she had drained from old Samuel Henderson, the pensioned clerk, until he declared that his attendance was a waste of time—pleasant, he had to admit, but still a waste.

So now this girl from the "rabble," as Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh had once phrased it, had become an important factor in the aristocratic household, and an almost indispensable confidant of Mrs. Copeland in the handling of her affairs. All this, with its implied responsibility, had steadied her, toned down her tendency to erratic exuberance. As her grandfather would have put it, she had "taken on ballast."

She would not have been herself had her course through these eighteen months been wholly of smooth sailing. Her warm temper, her pride, ever ready to spring out almost involuntarily, her strong sense of what she considered justice, were sometimes brought plump up against Mrs. Copeland's powerful will and settled convictions with a shock that might easily have meant disaster.

One day, as the two were going over some business matters at the mahogany desk, Mrs. Copeland said, with what seemed to the girl a touch of brusqueness:

"Agatha, where is that letter I asked you to copy and file?"

"It must be here; I brought it down from my room this morning."

"It isn't, or I shouldn't have asked you."

Agatha caught sight of the envelope on the desk. Hot with indignation that a charge of carelessness should be made against her without investigation, she rose imperiously and, pointing to the packet, said in an angry tone:—

"You will find it there, Mrs. Copeland; you've

no right to accuse me without looking," and swept out of the room and up to her chamber.

A few minutes later a very penitent Agatha came down again.

"Oh, Mrs. Copeland," she cried, striving to keep back her sobs, "will you forgive me? I—did bring back the envelope, but I left the letter in a book I was reading, and—just found it. What can you think of me?"

Such incidents as this were few, and when they did occur they made Mrs. Copeland's heart warm toward the girl rather than otherwise; she recognized Agatha's firmness in standing on her rights when justice seemed to be on her side, and her instant yielding when she was shown to be wrong, and she was by no means displeased.

Agatha's musical tastes were given every encouragement; in fact, when Mrs. Copeland found what a natural aptitude she had for the piano she insisted on a thorough course of instruction for the girl. Prof. Arpeggio went into ecstacies over his new pupil's cleverness; allowing for his characteristic flattery, however, she did play very well indeed. She had no very exalted opinion of her talents; once when a world-famous woman pianist came to Old Chetford for a recital she sat spellbound through it all, and nothing could induce her to touch her piano for a week.

"But my ears are still full of that wonderful, wonderful playing," she said, in answer to Mrs. Copeland's remonstrance. "Don't make me spoil it all by listening to myself. I want it to last."

But that was well in the past when, on a bright October afternoon, she was dashing through some velocity-studies with a precision and clearness good to hear. So thought an unperceived auditor who stood in an open piazza window and gazed in wonderment at the girl's flying fingers. At a pause in the playing he pounded his hands together with tremendous vigor.

"Grandfather!" cried the girl, as she ran to the window and dragged the beaming old fellow into the room, "you dear old boy; how did you ever get up to the window without my hearing you?"

The captain roared with laughter.

"*You* hear *me?*" he rejoined. "What, with all that crash-bang and licketty-larrup going on in the pianner? Why, I could have brought a whole ship's crew here and you'd never known the difference." Then he added tenderly:

"Are you glad to have Fridays come, Aggy?"

"Oh—yes!" she replied fervently; "whether you come here or I go down to the old 'Harpoon,' it's always a dear, delightful day. I wouldn't miss them for the world, not even for—this," and she looked about the fine room with eyes full of meaning. "I never would have wholly left you—you may well believe that—but what on earth are you so mysterious about?"

Truly the captain was conducting himself in a rather remarkable manner. He shifted uneasily from foot to foot, his face grew red and his glance constantly sought the open window through which

he had entered. Then a curious little chuckle was heard outside.

"It's a gray squirrel, I think," said Agatha, "there are lots of them in the trees."

"Ho, ho, ho," shouted the old sailor. "A squirrel! He, he, he. A *gray* squirrel. Come in here, you squirrel, and show yourself to the lady. Come in, I say."

And thereupon entered Hank Donelson to Agatha's great delight and surprise. Hank had been away from Old Chetford for over a year as mate of a coasting schooner and had just arrived in port. His youthful face and figure were absolutely unchanged. He looked at Agatha with a sort of awe.

"Why, Aggy, how ye've grown an' kinder plumped out. Why, ye're a out an' out lady with yer grand new riggin', an' as fer good looks—well, I ain't a goin' ter make yer vain, that's all. I says nothin' but I thinks a lot. I'm a kind of skeered of yer, fer a fact."

"Nonsense, Hank," said the girl as she cordially grasped his hand. "Weren't you my friend in the old days? Well, you are here, then. I haven't changed a bit."

By skilful little touches, mostly reminiscent, Agatha soon banished his diffidence and his sense of being out of his element in such luxurious surroundings.

"Now I'll play something for you, Hank," she exclaimed, merrily. "What shall it be? Ah, I have it."

Then came the infectious lilt of the "Sailor's Hornpipe," played as Hank had never heard it before. He would have danced, but that the velvet carpet said him nay.

But when it came to a song Hank yielded to the inevitable. All three joined in one of the rollicking choruses of "Harpoon" days. The merriment was at its height when the door opened and Mr. Guy Hamilton walked in.

Hank was terrified into dumbness instanter; the captain more gradually subsided, and Agatha, although she stopped singing, played the air through. She turned to Hamilton with a radiant smile.

"It was for old times' sake, Mr. Hamilton. Did it make a *horrible* noise?"

"Not at all, Agatha; it's pleasant to have the old house waked up now and then. How do you do, Captain? Introduce me to your somewhat diffident friend."

Evidently it was one of Mr. Hamilton's agreeable days. He shook Hank warmly by the hand, chatted pleasantly with the captain for a moment, and then went and stood beside Agatha, who was still at the piano.

"Sing me the 'Nussbaum,' will you, Agatha?" he asked in a caressing tone, the quality of which was not wholly respectful, "you know how I always enjoy it."

"Why yes, of course, if you wish. But why do you not sing it yourself? You know how I drilled and drilled you in it until you said you thought

'Nussbaum,' ate 'Nussbaum' and drank 'Nussbaum.'"

They laughed together at the recollection, but Guy had his way, and Agatha sang the beautiful *lied* with all the delicacy of her poetic nature. Then she devoted herself to her grandfather and Hank, and time passed on golden wings for all of them.

As the two old salts were on their way to the hospitable cabin of the "Harpoon" the talk turned, as a matter of course, on Agatha.

"Yes siree, Cap'n, the gal has changed mightily under her new rigging an' she's trim an' tidy to the masthead. But somehows or other I'm afeared she's got a pirate craft alongside in that feller that helped her play the pianner."

"Nonsense, Hank, my lad," returned the wholesouled Captain Joel, "why, he's Mrs. Copeland's nevvey. He was only manning the sides out o' politeness."

Hank said nothing more, but during the rest of the walk he shook his little head sagaciously and seemed to be engaged in preternaturally deep thought.

CHAPTER XIV

AN IDOL OF CLAY

"GOOD old chaps, by Jove," exclaimed Guy, after the captain and Hank had made their exit through the long window. "It's like a whiff of salt air on a hot day to have them in this formal place for an hour."

Agatha sighed ever so faintly, as she sat down before the piano again and struck a soft minor chord or two thoughtfully. It did not escape Hamilton, who had come to know the girl's moods far more thoroughly than one would have expected of a man of his character.

"What's the matter, Agatha? And the smiles that you flung about with such abandon a little while ago—where are they all gone?"

The girl whirled the piano stool about.

"I've been—thinking."

"Thinking? A bad practice for young girls, what are your thoughts about?"

"I've been—wondering—whether I'm a success or a failure here."

"Ask Aunt Sarah."

"No," Agatha replied very gently, "she is too

prejudiced in my favor. Oh, of course I have learned many things and quite outgrown the old 'Harpoon' girl. I can play and sing and talk in a decent fashion. But—am I—really fit for—?"

"For what?" he asked, as the pause seemed likely to continue indefinitely.

"For the higher world!" she blurted out, "the world of grand people, the world of society."

Guy looked at her in silent astonishment. She had ambitions, then, this girl from the ranks, ambitions not to be measured by the ordinary standards of youth. She had fixed her eyes on the mountain tops. "Yet why not?" he asked himself hurriedly; she had the magic fascination of beauty, the powerful force of personality, the irresistible attraction of a brilliant mind. Everything but station was hers, and he knew that that objection was by no means insuperable, even in race-proud Old Chetford. And there were far fields beyond. At last he answered her, but by a question in return.

"Why do you ask *me* that, Agatha?"

"Because," she replied fervently, "because you know everything; you are a man of that world, and a leader, too; oh, I *know* it," she hurried on as if to ward off any complacent deprecation, "I have seen it and heard of it. And your stories of the things you go to—don't you suppose I have drunk them all in, and longed for the time when you would come home and tell me about everything? But I—what real chance do I get to grow? I never see anybody nor go anywhere."

"But, my dear Agatha, you mustn't suppose that

you're not well worthy a place in what you call society. You know aunt entertains very little, and goes about to houses still less."

"Oh, I realize all that, and I know it is not her fault at all. But the fact is that I do not go. And when I see you so sought after, and such a figure among them all, it simply makes me long the more for a wider range of life. There; does that sound stilted and absurd? It's the best way I can put it, though. I would like to rule as Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh does. Now the murder is out."

Hamilton stared at a bit of pattern in the carpet, and made no answer. The mention of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's name recalled a train of rather unpleasant circumstances during the past year. In the first place the affair with Louise, the French girl, had been terminated all too abruptly by old Michet, her father, who, when he discovered the trend of affairs, removed with his daughter to another city.

There had been a violent scene at the Michets' one evening, at which time the big Frenchman had made unpleasant references to that sometimes salutary article, the horsewhip. However, the removal obviated the necessity of using it, and Guy considered the loss of Louise none too high a price to pay for escaping public scandal. There being no other special attraction for the time, he had gravitated back to Lucy Worth-Courtleigh, whose beauty and brilliancy he still found potent. Having regained her courtier, she kept a jealous and watchful eye upon his doings.

It was for this reason that Guy had not taken Agatha about as much as he would have liked. He

did occasionally escort her to a race of the Curlew Bay Yacht Club or to some other public entertainment, for which favors she was always grateful in simple fashion. For his part, he enjoyed her fresh, vigorous mind and the charm of her personality. The old hostility had long since disappeared.

He realized, being by no means a fool, that this very attractive girl was in turn attracted by him. He could see by the expression of her eyes when he came into a room where she was that her interest was in him before all others. And yet there was in that look a something that baffled him. He never saw her heart nor her soul within those liquid brown depths—that he could swear. Admiration was there, but not of a man—that nettled him sometimes; it was more the semi-worship of an impersonal being standing for something grand and far off.

"Ah, well," he said at last, "your day is sure to come, Agatha. Don't try to hasten it, for the throne of the society queen is generally studded with spikes. As for Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh—well, do you imagine she's entirely happy?"

"It isn't a question of happiness," returned the girl stoutly. "If I ever reach such things, I shall have too much to think of to waste time trying to be happy. Ah, you shall see."

The intensity of her words and manner stirred the smooth man of the world into a species of wonderment. He felt something more in this determination than the mere childish determination to be a great lady. But he preferred her in other moods

than this, and he took a sure means to bring about the change.

"Agatha," he said graciously, "there is to be an outing of the Camera Club to-morrow over at Fairport Point. How would you like to go?"

This invitation was safe, because Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was away in Boston, where her husband was arguing before the supreme court.

Again the childlike gratitude.

"Oh, I should love to," she answered.

"You see each member is to be permitted to invite an outsider. *You* are *my* outsider. The president—Tom Harrington, you know—got up the scheme to boom his reelection. We are all going to walk over to Fairport and down to the Point by twos—imagine Claybourne with a woman!—and then we are to spread ourselves about and take pictures. Each member is to take ten, and there are to be prizes for the best and the worst. After that there is to be a clambake by old Captain Sykes. What do you say to all that?"

"I say it's just splendid," she cried, "and you're so kind to think of me."

Never had Guy seen her look so charming as now. Her cheeks were flying the red banner of excitement and her eyes shone with anticipation. She leaned over him until her breath fanned his face.

He suddenly became forgetful of everything save that a tempting girl was almost in his arms. He would have clasped her to himself, had not she, catching a glimpse of his altered countenance, burst into laughter.

"Why, how funny you look!"

The spell was broken. When did ever ridicule or levity fail to cool impending passion?

"Do I?" he replied feebly, "I don't know why I should."

"Oh, but you *did;* it's gone now."

To Hamilton the situation was perplexing and unsatisfactory. How he, a man of wide experience and great *sang-froid,* had come so near to making an emotional breakdown with this young and still childlike girl was more than he could explain to his accusing self. Mere prettiness would never have so affected him, nor yet *diablerie* of the purely physical sort. He was ordinarily cool, even in his most assiduous conquests. But this impulse was totally different; there was in it impelling force he had never felt before. He wondered if it could be that love so contemptuously waved aside by his friend Claybourne, and then dismissed the suggestion impatiently.

Agatha had turned away, and was gazing out at the dying day. She gave no sign whatever as to whether she had seen his almost involuntary intent to enfold her and had evaded it by a laugh, or whether, as she said, there had been something on his face to excite her mirth. He finally decided that the ways of women were past finding out, and that strict analysis of Agatha was neither pleasant nor profitable.

The girl first caught the sound of wheels coming up the driveway.

"There comes Mrs. Copeland," she said, "and

I'm very glad of it, for I am hungry. Heigho, I wish grandfather could ever be persuaded to stay to dinner with us. And Hank—how John would enjoy Hank at the table."

"Well, children," was Mrs. Copeland's greeting as she came briskly into the room a moment later, "are you nearly starved? Why, Agatha, how bright you look."

"Oh, it's going to be such fun," cried the girl, "and *I* am going; Mr. Hamilton has invited me."

"Where pray?"

"The Camera Club has a little outing to-morrow," explained Guy.

"Oh, I see. More nonsense," said Mrs. Copeland, with a smile.

"Dinner is served," announced the butler, in his most sepulchral tones.

Over the soup Mrs. Copeland looked at the pair approvingly, and speculated as to what might happen were Guy only different. She even went so far as to hope he could be made different under the influence of such a girl as Agatha. Stranger things had happened, she told herself, and the thought gave her deep satisfaction. She would leave the matter to time.

CHAPTER XV

A ROLLING STONE

THE day for the Camera Club's outing was one of those beautiful gifts of mellow October for which Old Chetford is famed above all other New England towns. The air was spicy and just tempered to the degree for out-of-door pleasure. If it were the intent of the members of the select organization to woo nature with their plates and films, that gracious lady seemed ready to lend herself smilingly to the process. It was a day to feel the gladness of young life, to send the blood along its course in leaps and bounds; the melancholy of later weeks was still afar off.

Agatha's spirits were more than characteristically buoyant as she walked along with Hamilton to the rendezvous of the club. He was a fine and commanding figure in his fashionably cut outing suit, and his air was that of a man who knows his social value and his personal charm. As the unsophisticated girl at his side stole glances at him from time to time, she was sure that no one in all Old Chetford could compare with her own special cavalier in the manly graces, and she felt the pride that is but natural to a young woman selected by so notable a figure.

At the tomblike old granite City Hall, set in a tiny square of grass, a dozen or more of the members of the Camera Club had already assembled when Agatha and Hamilton arrived. Guy took especial pleasure in introducing his pretty companion to those leading lights of the club whom she did not already know. He had carefully instilled into her the fact that membership was one of the most prized social distinctions in the town, and she felt that this bright day was perhaps the beginning of her career. If she had any trepidation, however, as she was presented to Thomas Harrington, Esq., a fat, heavy-jowled banker, and the president of the club, she gave no evidence of it, and, indeed, acquitted herself with such tact and dainty charm that Hamilton was thoroughly delighted.

"Charmed to meet you, Miss Renier," said Mr. Harrington pompously, adjusting his eyeglasses the better to examine her face, "we've all heard, of course, of Mrs. Copeland's protégée; I trust you will enjoy our little trip. I warn you against my friend Hamilton, however; he's a dangerous fellow, very dangerous indeed. Ha, ha, ha!"

And he shook his fat sides and dug Guy in the ribs much to the latter's disgust.

Others of the "Hill" set were on hand, notably Captain Claybourne, who had permitted himself to be brought by Miss Mehitabel Anastasia Postlethwaite, a maiden of maturity, who wore a cataract of little brown curls at the back of her head and had written a book of poems.

Claybourne looked uncomfortable. For years it

had been an accepted fact that Miss Postlethwaite had been setting her cap at the gallant captain; so far back, in fact, that, as the frivolous expressed it, "she outgrew the article of headgear twenty years ago."

The Reverend Archibald Greenacre, with an immense tripod camera, under whose weight he fairly staggered, hurried up a little later, preceded by his tall and bony wife, whose personal appearance might have suggested a cause for his own meekness.

Mr. Alphonso Emerson, custodian of the Old Chetford Public Library, was paired off with a mischievous schoolgirl, whose love of fun was not dampened in the least by her diffident, stammerng escort. Mr. Emerson was very near sighted and could not see to take a picture, but that mattered little to him; a camera was a good enough peg to hang a club on, and he hailed the new organization as distinctly educational. His wife, a simpering lady with a youthful taste in dress, was also of the party, escorted by Dr. Hackett, a jolly old surgeon who had seen service in the Civil War.

The company at last completed by the addition of a dozen more couples of local distinction, a start was made for Fairport. The sight of the two score persons armed with hand cameras, which were not so familiar at that time, was especially grateful to the street urchins along the water front, who somehow lacked that reverence for ancestry felt by most of the club members. A few of the bolder formed themselves into a whistling band and took upon themselves the honor of leading the procession.

Others furnished gratuitous information of an unpleasant nature about the trials of photography, and all enjoyed themselves hugely until driven off by an indignant policeman.

As the company wended its dignified way over the long and unsightly bridge that led across the harbor to Fairport, Agatha stepped from the ranks for a moment and looked down along the line of wharves. Yes, there was the old "Harpoon," distinct because of its spotless deck, and there, too, floated the flag at its bow.

"Grandfather's in," she exclaimed brightly, "and perhaps Hank, too. Dear old ship! Couldn't we take a picture of it, Mr. Hamilton?"

"No, no, Agatha, not now; come along," he said rather impatiently. Then, seeing the disappointment on her face, he added kindly: "It's too far off, anyway. Perhaps when we come back we can go down and get a good shot at it."

On the Fairport side Agatha and Hamilton, tempted by the autumnal beauty of the fields, left the direct road to the fort at the point and followed a little path which skirted a thicket of glowing color.

Here was Guy in his cleanest mental attitude toward women. The beautiful day, the sylvan and peaceful scene, the presence of this unspoiled and charming girl at his side, made of him for the moment a man of fine impulses. As he looked at Agatha, brimming over with pleasure from the little outing which was so happily varying the routine of her life, he could not help a comparison of her with Lucy Worth-Courtleigh; it was a simple, fragrant

blush-rose beside a brilliant and overpoweringly intense exotic.

The girl was bubbling over with a pretty curiosity that led her to ask all sorts of questions, as if he were a great repository of fact and fancy. It flattered him, and he answered good-naturedly when he could and with humorous evasion when he could not.

"What about your pictures?" she queried, as they walked along at a swinging pace.

"Pictures; what pictures?" he replied blankly.

"Why, these," tapping the handsome and costly camera slung at his side.

"Ah, to be sure—pictures—of course. Stupid of me, by Jove. Do you know I'd forgotten all about them. It would be the proper thing to take a picture, wouldn't it? But what shall it be?"

"That," cried Agatha, pointing to an opening in the trees through which showed a bit of road and a quaint red farmhouse. Beyond the russet arch of the leaves glimmered the deep blue of the bay. It was a vista to delight an artist.

"It *is* pretty," returned Hamilton, unslinging his camera. "I'm a bit rusty on this sort of thing, but I guess I can make it work."

"O-o-h!" exclaimed Agatha, as she looked into the "finder" at Guy's request and saw the lovely miniature reproduction of the scene. "Isn't that fine? A little to the right. There! Splendid!"

Her hair brushed his hand as she bent to the camera to take her observation. The just perceptible contact tingled like electricity. He pressed the little knob, and at the dull click she started up.

"You—we shall certainly win the prize with that; the others cannot hope to find anything so beautiful."

"No? They might if they were here," he replied, with a measured emphasis quite foreign to his usual devil-may-care speech.

"Why, what *could* they see more beautiful than that picture through the trees? It's like our Corot at home."

"Just stand there a moment," he said, pushing Agatha gently into the opening between the trees to a spot where the sun shone brightly, "just stand there, and you can help me win the prize."

With the light on her upraised, wondering face, the girl looked like a dryad of the autumn. Her hat had fallen back, and her hair was blown into picturesque confusion by the soft wind that came up from the Gulf Stream. She was the incarnation of the bloom of life made more exquisite by contrast with the dying year.

"Why how can *I* help you?"

Another click, and a light laugh from Hamilton, who replaced his camera on his shoulder.

"No more pictures to-day," he said jauntily.

"No more? I thought everyone was to take ten."

"Not necessarily, Agatha. The prize picture is here," tapping the black box confidently. She was not convinced.

"How can you tell what the others may find?"

"I don't care what they find; none of them can have you in the foreground."

"Me? What has that to do with it?" she asked, with complete lack of coquetry.

"Everything. You see—upon my soul, Agatha Renier, don't you know that you are a beautiful girl?"

She felt the hot blood mount to her face. No man save her grandfather had ever told her such a thing before, and there was the whole world of difference between his simple-hearted flattery and this bold and disquieting admiration. She raised her eyes and found him gazing at her with an expression she could not fathom, but was sure she did not like.

She took refuge in that woman's way that is as old as the sex: an apparent ignoring of the great salient fact, and a changing of the dangerous subject to the commonplace.

"Don't you think we had better be going on?" she said, "It is quite a distance to the fort."

"As you please," Guy replied stiffly, as with something very like a sigh he followed her toward the roadway.

A stone wall was directly across their path, and Agatha stepped upon it with little care. Her one desire was to return to the party and so be rid of the awkwardness that had so suddenly arisen between them.

"Wait; let me help you," said Hamilton, as he stretched out his hand toward hers.

"Oh, no, thank you; I——"

The little deprecatory laugh was interrupted by a dull grind as one of the stones on which she was standing became dislodged and rolled to the ground. She tottered for an instant, striving to regain her balance, and uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"You're hurt," cried Guy, springing toward the swaying girl, whose pale and drawn face told the story of her suffering.

"Yes, I'm afraid I *am* a little—I'm such a nuisance. What——"

The world closed in around her, and she would have fallen had not Hamilton caught her in his arms.

"Fainted, by Jove," he exclaimed, gazing down into the white, lovely face in the hollow of his arm. "Agatha! Agatha!"

But Agatha made no sound; she scarcely gave a sign of life.

Then this courtly man of the world, this darling of society, this first gentleman of Old Chetford bent his head and kissed the unresisting lips. As ice will sometimes give the same sensation as fire, so Agatha's cold mouth inflamed his passion. Again and again he kissed her until an incoherent murmur warned him that she was coming back to consciousness.

The sound of wheels from a passing carriage startled him. He realized that the occupants must have witnessed the tableau in which he had been the only active participant, and he wondered who they might be. He had little time for speculation, however, for Agatha had revived and he knew she would need immediate attention.

"It's—sprained—I believe," said the girl, as she tried to put the foot on the ground, and cringed with the hurt. "Oh, dear, I have spoilt your day by my carelessness. I'm *so* sorry."

"Never mind my day, Agatha; perhaps it's not spoilt after all. Lean on me and we'll get to the red

farmhouse somehow. There I can hire some kind of a rig, I guess, and take you home. Come now; that's right; there's a brave girl."

* * * * * * *

"I always thought Guy Hamilton was not exactly the right sort," said Robert Worth-Courtleigh to his pretty wife as they rode along toward the fort "Who was that girl?"

"She?" replied the lady with a bitter smile, "she's that young upstart that Mrs. Copeland is making such a fool of herself over."

"Oho! The girl she has ad—practically adopted. Joel Stewart's granddaughter. I always understood she was not of the common kind."

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh made no reply, but as they drove on to the point, whither the lady had insisted on being taken on their arrival by the morning train from Boston, the sturdy lawyer wondered what was the matter with his buggy that such a continuous tap-tap-tap should be given forth by something under the floor.

He did not know that it was his wife's neat little foot forming a sort of safety-valve for her surcharged emotions, nor did he notice that her hands were clutched so tightly together that she was obliged to remove her torn gloves when she reached the scene of the Camera Club's festivities.

But before she arrived at the fort, Lucy Worth-Courtleigh had outlined her plan of campaign and had decided to assume the offensive at the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER XVI

PHINEAS SYKES'S CLAMBAKE

THE constituent parts of the Camera Club had swept down the road toward the ruined fort without especial comment on the absence of Agatha and Guy Hamilton. In fact, the various oddly assorted couples were quite sufficiently engaged with one another to preclude any thought of deserters at this time.

Captain Claybourne, for instance, was inwardly groaning as Miss Postlethwaite was making him the recipient—the very first, she gushingly assured him—of her "Lines to a Stranded Dog-Fish," written during her summer at Quitno beach.

"Ha, hum; most touching; beautiful, very," he said absent-mindedly when the recital had ended. He was thinking of the Attawam Club with longing heart, and wondering how he, a pronounced and notorious avoider of femininity, should have been led to the sacrifice in this manner.

Miss Nelly Nevins, the schoolgirl to whom all life was a joke, succeeded in raising dark thoughts in the breast of Librarian Emerson, her partner. They two chanced to be the rear-guard of the company.

"Is that—oh, Mr. Emerson, I'm afraid it is—*is* that a bull?" she asked in a trembling voice, as they

passed an unusually placid cow chewing her cud in a farm door-yard.

"I perceive but uncertainly," replied the near-sighted gentleman, hastening his pace with alacrity, "but the animal does bear a resemblance to the 'taurus ingens' of the Romans. Let us accelerate our steps," and the frightened man fairly dragged the laughing damsel along after the others.

As they neared their destination, Claybourne became as uneasy as his philosophical mind would permit over the continued non-appearance of Hamilton and Agatha Renier.

He had been suspecting for some time that Guy was not wholly oblivious to the charms of his aunt's protégée, and as the young man's closest friend he had warned him in vague fashion once or twice, always to be met with a laughing disclaimer that did not convince him. The propinquity of a pretty young woman was to him always a position of danger, and he knew Guy's inflammable nature.

The thud-thud of a horse's hoofs and the rumble of a passing carriage interrupted his musing.

"Hello, old man," cried a gruffly cheery voice, as the equipage rolled by, "stir along, or you'll never get there."

Claybourne caught a glimpse of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's face. It was set and hard, and bore traces of some unpleasant experience. He wondered if she had been quarreling with her husband, and ended, as usual, by thanking God that he had no wife. Poor Miss Postlethwaite!

Having reached the fort, the camera-armed company broke ranks and entered upon the work of the day. The rocks, the trees, the bay, the city opposite, the shipping sliding out of the harbor, the far-off islands, were all lured into the little black boxes from every conceivable point of view and with all degrees of skill, varying from the cleverness of "Tom" Harrington, who was an amateur of great ability, to the wretched, misfocussed attempts of Mr. Emerson. Then they photographed each other in groups and pairs and ones.

"Where *is* dear Mr. Hamilton," asked Mrs. Emerson at last, "our pictures will never be complete without him in them and that pretty Renier girl—what can have kept them?"

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh surveyed the group through half-closed eyelids.

"Really, I think his time is quite fully occupied," she said, in an indolent tone that gave the lie to the significance of her words. "He is more pleasantly engaged than he could possibly be down here."

"Nonsense, nonsense," puffed Harrington, growing red in the face at this implied slight on his cherished club, "Hamilton enjoys photography thoroughly; he told me so himself."

She laughed with the irritating manner of superior knowledge.

"There are many thing he enjoys better, 'Tom.'"

"Such as what?" persisted the president of the Camera Club, with his accustomed bovine obtuseness.

"Oh—er—now I think of it, I believe I saw Mr.

Hamilton and that girl together in the field as we passed the red farmhouse—do *you* think she's pretty, 'Tom'?"

A sudden hush fell upon the company. This speech from a woman of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's standing, a speech so unmistakable in its virulence, astounded most of them who knew of the friendship between the lady and Guy. Even the heavy-witted Harrington saw a great light.

"Whe-e-ew," he whistled under his breath, "so that's the jig, is it? Well, I'm——. And I warned her against him this very morning. Deep girl. The joke seems to be on your uncle Thomas."

"Come on, people," he cried to his band of enthusiasts, now turned into a coterie of incipient scandal-mongers, "let's go down to the water and see the bake."

There is a fascination in watching the preparations for and the cooking of a clambake known to no other culinary process. The kitchen is one of Mother Nature's fragrant and appetizing places, the cooks are generally quaint old characters and skilful providers and the odors from the steaming feast can be matched by nothing else in all the world. Add a day of enticing beauty and a background of dreamy charm such as our club messmates had, and the thing is complete.

The mellow old Captain Sykes, best manager of a "bake" on all Curlew Bay, and his weazened assistant, Artemas Slickersley, who knew the ways of clams and lobsters as well as any man, had already begun their preparations. They had built a roaring

fire of driftwood in a sort of mammoth saucer formed carefully of large stones; great piles of yellow-green seaweed, torn from the rocks along the shore, were heaped near by, flanked by the bushels of clams, dozens of lobsters and boxes of other appropriate eatables that the two tars had previously brought over from the city in their long whale-boat.

The fire was now only a glowing mass of coals, and Artemas was engaged in raking off the larger pieces. The stones were fiercely hot, as the old fellow found to his satisfaction when he tested them with a bit of dripping seaweed.

"Ready, Cap'n," he squeaked to his rotund superior officer, "ye can't make no mistake now ef ye chuck the hull grub outfit right on."

First a thin layer of seaweed was placed on the stones, and then the big baskets of clams were emptied of their loads. Over this bed of shells were deposited the writhing green lobsters, angrily protesting against this sort of martyrdom by closing and opening their powerful claws in the vain effort to pinch the hands of the wary old sailors.

"Lawbsters is like women," volunteered Sykes as he deftly tossed a big fellow into the centre of the mass. "Handle 'em jest right, an' ye don't never have no trouble with 'em. But git a bit careless, an' miss yer holt, an' yer nipped all-fired hard."

Another sprinkling of the seaweed, and then came the corn in the husk, a late growth from Captain Sykes's own garden. Upon this was heaped a big mass of the green ocean plant. Some sweet potatoes were tucked in around the edges on the very rocks

themselves, and a great canvas was stretched over all to keep the heat in. Now the pile was left to steam itself into one glorious repast, of different parts, to be sure, but blended into a gastronomically harmonious whole by the touch of the mighty savor of the sea.

With ever sharpening appetites the club folk gathered around the fragrant pile to watch the progress of events. Captain Sykes and Artemas were plied with questions.

"Oh, Captain," cooed Miss Postlethwaite, "does it hurt the poor clams, do you think, to be put on those terrible rocks?"

"Wall, ma'am," replied the veteran urbanely, "I allus suspects that it does. Cause why? The critters opens their mouths an' gives a hiss when they hits the heat. Ef ye puts yer head down cluss, ye can hear 'em now."

"Why, so I can," exclaimed the lady, "isn't it horrible. I don't think I ever can eat one again." And she then and there determined that her next poem should have for its central thought the tyranny of man as applied to the helpless bivalve.

"Now, Captain," said Harrington with his best air of patronage, "we want you and Artemas to stand up by the 'bake' and be photographed. We are all going to snap you at once."

"Sho, now," returned the old man, "I weren't never took by anybody in my life, nor Artemas, nuther, I'll be bound."

"Hain't I?" cried Slickersley triumphantly, "wall, thet's jest whar yer off'n yer bearin's, ship-

mate. When I was up to Bosting three year ago I went down ter the beach, an' was took on tin with a fine gal I met who said I made her think of her pa. She said as how she'd pay fer the picters, an' I gin her ten dollars ter git changed, but jest then a whistle blew an' she said she had ter run ter ketch her train, an' I ain't never seen her nor the money sence."

A roar of laughter greeted the ancient mariner's tale.

"Shet up, ye ol' fool," growled Sykes, "wanter gin yerself away afore all these swells, do ye? But we ain't got much on fer clothes, Mr. Harrington. Ef we'd a-known——"

"No, no," cried the ladies, "just as you are, by all means. You are *so* much more picturesque."

"Wall, all right," said the captain good-naturedly, though a little in doubt as to whether he had been complimented or not, "fire away; Artemas an' me will do our duty by ye."

The members formed a semicircle, and all got their cameras in position. The captain and his thin mate stood at either side of the steaming pile, and set their faces into wooden smiles. Then Mr. Harrington gave the signal, forty clicks resounded like the firing of some midget battery, and the deed was done.

Captain Sykes lifted an edge of the canvas, and took a long professional sniff. Then he poked about a bit until the red claw of a lobster appeared to view.

"In jest five minoots more," he declared, "ye'll be a-wrastlin' with the best grub the Lord'll ever gin ye in this ere world of our'n."

In the meantime stakes had been driven into the

ground near by, and cross pieces nailed on them. Over these were placed long boards, and a rude but substantial table was the result. This was now spread with coarse earthen dishes and cups and pewter eating utensils. Artemas had made coffee in a gigantic pot that had once helped cheer a crew of whale hunters beyond the Arctic circle.

"Haul off," came the cheery cry from the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir," piped Artemas, and in a minute or two the luscious treasures of the deep were uncovered.

There was a rush for seats and a great rattling of plates, knives and forks. Some of the men served as waiters, bringing up the clams in immense bread-pans and the lobsters in little wooden trays. The Reverend Archibald Greenacre, who conceived the idea that he ought to be helpful, was among the most enthusiastic of the servitors. Not even the fact that he lost his balance while stooping to gather some clams from the "bake," and burned his hands on the hot stones as he fell, could quench his ardor. He even overheard himself called a "lubber" by the disgusted Captain Sykes without making any protest, so full of the joy of assisting was he.

But his happiness, like other joys of life, as he had often preached, was transitory, for when he took his place at the table to indulge in his favorite creature comforts of clams and melted butter, his wife whispered to him with her air of authority:—

"Archibald, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh tells me that she saw Mr. Hamilton kiss that girl of his aunt's. I don't know whether to believe her or not; but it's our

duty to find out. Get Worth-Courtleigh one side by and by, and ask him; *he* tells the truth, anyway."

The clergyman's heart sank. He was a gentleman at heart, and had little taste for such an errand. But his wife's personality was so much stronger than his own, and her income so much larger, that he had fallen into a slough of unquestioning obedience. So, after the feast had been eaten and pronounced the best in Old Chetford's history, he sought out Worth-Courtleigh, who was alone by the water smoking a cigar.

"Greenacre," said the bluff lawyer, after hearing the rector's mission, "what I saw or did not see I conceive to be no one's business but my own. When I enter the profession of gossips, I shall withdraw from the bar—and my practice is quite large at present. Have a cigar."

But he wondered at his wife's injudicious dropping of the story, entirely innocently of course, and he sighed to think what trouble her thoughtlessness might arouse.

CHAPTER XVII

A SHATTERED IDOL

KEPT within the Bristol Street mansion for the next week or two by her sprained ankle, Agatha found herself a very cheerful prisoner. Guy was careful to see that she was provided with the rarest of flowers and the daintiest of sweetmeats, to both of which tributes her heart warmed instinctively. He himself devoted much time to her pleasure, and talked and read to her with all the ability he possessed.

He looked upon himself as in a certain sense the cause of her accident; he even experienced a feeling of shame sometimes as he remembered the kisses he had pressed upon her lips under circumstances which he would have been quick to condemn in anyone else. He admitted freely now the fascination of the girl, yet something kept in restraint his impulse to make open love to her.

"Confound it," he said to himself one day, as he watched Agatha's lovely profile half-eclipsed by a book she was reading, "I want her, and yet I can't tell her so. What's the matter with me? I never was troubled in that line before."

Then the face of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh rose into

his mental perspective, filled with passion, as he knew it would be, should he declare for another and a purer allegiance. He knew that he would be a coward before the fury of a woman scorned, and he felt no taste for such self-debasement.

"Oh, Lord," he thought, "why do we men always get into these infernal messes? Why can't we all be Claybournes, with his 'let 'em alone, and they'll let you alone'? I'd like to cut the whole business, and I might if it weren't for the money."

His uneasiness had been greatly augmented that same day by the receipt of a little envelope whose perfume he would have known, even had there been no superscription. The note inside read:—

"Meet me at two this afternoon at H——'s without fail. There is something of great importance I wish to say to you. *L."*

He cursed fate again, but he knew he would obey; he felt that back of the curt command was a threat that admitted of no parleying. He would face the music and learn the worst at once.

He little knew of the struggles that tore the heart of Lucy Worth-Courtleigh before she decided to send for him. Ever since the fleeting sight of that kiss in the fields her wrath had made such sport of her that even her husband noticed that something was amiss, and anxiously asked if she were ill.

In the seclusion of her chamber she chewed the bitter cud of reflection, until at times she could have screamed aloud. Pride urged her to let him go with

scornful silence; but the jealousy born of a powerful infatuation spurred her to meet him face to face and see if there were any glimmer of excuse for his conduct.

And so, at the appointed hour, this leader of Old Chetford's "modern" set and this hero of social romance found one another.

The place of their rendezvous was a public house at the northern end of Bristol Street known as "Howard's." It had once been the home of a rich old recluse, and even now it looked like a private estate, set far back from the street in a heavy growth of trees and surrounded by a high and dark stone wall. Its reputation for good fare was unimpeachable, but for all that the women who had occasion to visit the place generally did so heavily veiled. The kind who would not have cared whether their faces were seen or not were strictly debarred by the proprietor, a retired English army man, who prided himself greatly on the quality of his patronage.

In a little private parlor of "Howard's" there had been a violent scene between the two, so violent that the landlord had to come and gently beg for less noise. Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh threw all caution to the winds, and railed at the unfortunate Guy like a fish-wife.

"So you have found a new toy to take up your time, have you?" she said when he entered the room, "a new woman to kiss, another to add to your string of conquests, you liar. You'd deny it, would you? Well, I saw you put your lips upon that nameless creature from the wharves, over in Fairport that day.

"Come now, Lucy ; Agatha's a good girl."

Dear little innocent! She believes you, of course, trusts you implicitly, relies on your honor, and all that. Faugh!"

Staggered at this revelation of her knowledge, Guy shifted, stammered and temporized in a dazed and helpless fashion, which fed the woman's wrath the more. He could not tell the truth about the incident of the kisses, and thus clear Agatha, for he knew that would turn ridicule upon himself, and make his transgression all the more unforgivable.

He rang for brandy, drank a large draught, and then stared stupidly at the handsome termagant as she went on with her bitter tirade.

"Oh, you are very much relieved, no doubt," she cried, "to be free of me and to find fresh material for your peculiar style of wooing. And they say this girl is fresh and unspotted with the world, and all that sickening stuff. I say she's——"

"Come, now, Lucy; Agatha's a good girl," he remonstrated.

"Bah! Tell me that about a girl who lets *you* kiss her in a country by-way. She's of vile origin, and she doesn't belie her stock—But you!" she cried with passionate pleading, "how could you do it, remembering me? How could you, how could you?"

Something—perhaps the sight or the influence of the brandy—suggested a means of escape to Hamilton. He accepted it with gratitude.

"Well, I'll tell you the whole truth, Lucy, and you'll see that I—that you have been treating me very unjustly. I'm ashamed to say it, but the fact is that before I started on that infernal camera ex-

pedition I went to the club and got to drinking; drank altogether too much and wasn't myself at all. What I did in the field I hardly remembered afterward. Do you think I could forget you in my right mind? Never, Lucy; I swear it."

This bit of diplomacy on Guy's part was well timed. Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's anger had passed its climax, and in the reaction came tenderer thought of the man who so filled her horizon. Partly because she wished to, and partly because it seemed plausible, she believed the story, and gradually came to her normal frame of mind.

To clinch the advantage and make her quiet, if nothing more, Guy added a quite gratuitous lot of vows and protestations of fealty, which he argued, would not hurt him, and would do wonders for her peace of mind.

She went home completely mollified as regards Guy, but more determined than ever in her hatred of Agatha, who, she reasoned, must have taken advantage of her escort's condition with some deep intent of bettering herself—perhaps a future marriage. That, she felt, she could and would prevent.

Hamilton sought the sheltering fold of the Attawam Club as soon as the interview was over. He felt that he needed some antidote against the nerve-racking experience of the afternoon, and, as usual, he relied upon alcohol to supply the remedy.

He drank heavily there, but no resulting joy came from the potations. Instead there was only a sodden discontent with life and its burdens. He remembered a new French romance at home in the library,

and he determined to go and read it that he might forget his woes.

Without seeing anyone he went directly to the library in search of his book. There he found Agatha, who had been assisted to a seat near the window, and was now reading by the last rays of the declining sun. She turned to him with a bright smile and a cheerful welcome.

With the virago wrath of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh still ringing in his ears, he looked at this embodiment of purity and truth, and felt, even through his drink-dulled brain, a deeper emotion than had ever yet stirred within him. Coupled with this was a sensuous admiration for the girl's warm and radiant loveliness, a feeling that would no longer be controlled by what he considered mere conventionality.

He steadied his voice as best he could, and began to talk to her in a vein he had rarely used before. He spoke of her gifts, of her opportunities for storming the fortress of life; he led her to talk of herself, of her aspirations, of her visions for the future. In all this there was on his part a persistent coupling of him and her that she could not fathom. He spoke of *their* future now.

"Yes, m'dear," he burst forth, "we'll show 'em that they can't ride over us, not one of 'em. We'll show 'em that we don't care for their frippery morality that's generally a sham from the word go. None of their musty Puritanism for us, eh, Agatha?"

"But why—why should you speak so of me—of yourself?" she asked in large-eyed wonder.

"Oh, hang it, don't make it so hard for a fellow. Don't you know, can't you guess that I love you?"

Had the aristocratic roof of the Copeland mansion fallen about her ears, Agatha could have scarcely been more astonished. Keen of perception though she was, she had seen nothing heretofore to suggest such a thing. Hamilton had been to her too impersonal, too much an ideal standing quite beyond her, to dream of as a lover. Now she heard, but did not credit her senses.

"That *you*—love *me?*" she gasped.

She was so startled that when Guy drew her closely to himself, throwing an arm about her shoulder, she made no effort to release herself.

"Is it such a surprise, Agatha?" he asked hoarsely, bending his head so closely to hers that their faces almost touched.

At that moment she knew the truth.

She slipped from his grasp, and faced him with an air of defiance.

"Agatha! Have you no word for me? I love you —love you. You must know what that means."

"Mr. Hamilton, I am truly sorry; but I fear you are not quite—not quite yourself to-day."

"Not quite myself, eh? Well, how can a man be himself when he's in love? But what do you mean?"

"I mean that you have been drinking," she answered steadily.

"Well, and what if I have?" he queried, with a harsh laugh.

"Nothing, except that the words you have just used were evidently inspired by liquor and not by

your heart. They are an insult, under such circumstances, which you must not repeat."

By the aid of table and chairs she made her way to the bell-cord, and before Guy had fully realized what she was doing, rang for the butler. That mournful functionary, after a significant glance at Hamilton, assisted her to her room with elaborate ceremony.

There, in its pure seclusion, the girl wept in youthful fashion over the fall of her cherished idol. She had hitherto admired Guy as a "gentleman," a title which to her stood for a mystical sort of being, the human symbol of nobility of nature and the perfection of courtesy.

And now! As with her childhood's doll, she had found that her ideal was stuffed with sawdust. He had become as common as the commonest by his insult to her pride. To be made love to by a drunken man! It was incredibly vile, something of which she felt she ought to purge herself, like the Hebrew women of old. Love? She knew nothing of it, and if this were one of its manifestations, she wanted never to hear of it more.

Being left to his own gloomy reflections in the library by this girl who, strangely enough, was not honored by his advances, Guy tried to read the French romance which had innocently precipitated the latest trouble of a troubled day. But the amours of the type of heroine in which he usually delighted had no power to charm him now, and at last he tossed the book into a corner and quit the house for his great mecca, the club.

There he found a rather congenial crowd, and again drank more than was necessary. Yet he could not shake off the thought of Agatha's haunting eyes and the vision of her proud face.

"By heaven," he said to himself, "I almost believe I'd have asked her to marry me."

CHAPTER XVIII

"GOD ALMIGHTY'S GENTLEMAN"

DINNER that evening was not a specially enlivening meal at Mrs. Copeland's. Guy did not return, and his aunt missed the bits of conversation that were wont to fly back and forth between her nephew and Agatha. As for the girl, she was as dumb as the oysters with which they began their well ordered repast, nor did she arouse from her silence with any real effectiveness, although she struggled bravely once or twice.

"Well, well, my dear," at last exclaimed the old woman in a sort of mock consternation, "what's happened to your tongue? Off its hinges, I daresay. Ah, it takes Guy to make it wag, not a crusty old creature like me. Odd he didn't come in to dinner. John said he went out not half an hour before the bell rang. Did he say anything to you?"

"No—not about dinner," returned the girl, whose vivid cheeks she feared would signal something to the keen Mrs. Copeland.

"Nor where he was going?"

"No, not a word."

"It's strange he should go off so near dinner time," said Mrs. Copeland, looking searchingly at her pretty vis-a-vis.

"Very," assented Agatha, and the meal concluded with no more light on the whereabouts of the wandering Guy.

"Play me something, child," said Mrs. Copeland, as she called for lights in the drawing-room.

The wretched girl was in no mood for the piano, but she sat down dutifully and opened a folio of music at random.

It chanced that Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" came to the surface, and she began to play it gently.

The tender melancholy of the music, the haunting beauty of its harmonies and the suggestion of its name were too much for Agatha in her overstrung state of mind; she was the maiden, and the "death" was the death of that maiden's dream of a hero. Tears filled her eyes and she could not go on.

"I—I'm not feeling very well to-night, Mrs. Copeland," she said brokenly. "I don't think I'll play any more, if you'll excuse me."

"Tut, tut," the old lady thought, "nerves! A new thing for Agatha. There's something back of all this, I'll be bound. But I'll let nature work." Then she said aloud kindly:—

"Well, well, my dear, you needn't play any more, of course. Get a good sleep to-night, and I don't doubt you'll be all right in the morning. You want to be, for Mr. Harding is coming, you know."

Yes, Mr. Harding was coming, and Agatha felt a sense of satisfaction at the knowledge. *He* was to be relied upon, in any event. Not being on a pedestal, he could not fall. She liked him heartily and

honestly, and enjoyed his tuition—which had now come to be more the discussion of equals than she realized.

Once behind the locked door of her bedroom, she indulged in the luxury of a clearing-up shower of tears, and then she sat down with her Tennyson, who was to be the subject of to-morrow's talk, and tried to read. But not even the imagery and beauty of the lines could hold the girl's thoughts for long. The handsome face of Guy, changed into something coarse and mean, kept arising before the printed page.

"How *dared* he?" she asked herself. What had she done to give him occasion to believe that she could be treated with less respect than other women. She did not know, of course, of his escapades in lower life. She judged his usual treatment of the sex by what she saw him do in his own sphere.

Even if he did love her, she mused,—and the thought gave her no thrill such as she had learned to know in fiction—he had no right to tell her so in such a fashion and in such a condition. Had he been himself, and had he asked her to marry him, she might have hesitated in her answer; she might have doubted whether the tempestuous love of romance, which she knew she did not have, was of the right sort, and she might not have said him nay.

But now Guy's condemnation was complete. Forgiveness and forgetfulness, the ordinary cures for the little lapses of mankind, would not come in this case, for the truth was clear to her mind that in that scene in the library was revealed the true Guy Hamil-

ton. Forgiveness can never change a fact; forgetfulness is a glossing that cannot be trusted.

There was to Agatha a very real and poignant grief in this, mingled with strong resentment that a man of her own household should be the one, of all others, to destroy a bright illusion. She wondered if all the men of the set in which he shone were as empty and false as he.

She went to bed early, and after a bit more of self-communion in the dark, fell into sound sleep with the locket in which her mother's face was framed clasped close to her heart. Once she awoke and thought she heard an unusual noise in the hall below. She knew it was Guy coming home. Had she seen him, her disgust would have been complete.

Next morning Agatha was up with the sun, humming gaily as she busied herself with the pretty mysteries of her toilet. Her mood matched the crisp and glowing morning, and gone was all the dark melancholy of the night before. As she passed through the lower hall on her way to the breakfast-room, she caught sight of Guy's hat and coat on the hat-tree.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hamilton," she said making an elaborate courtesy to the articles of apparel, "I'll venture to say that you do not feel as well as I do this morning."

The owner of the hat and coat did not appear until Agatha and Mrs. Copeland had breakfasted, and then he made a wry face at his egg and dallied ineffectually with his coffee.

"What an ass I must have been," he mused as he

tried to find something of interest in the morning paper, "and how that young spitfire did 'my lady' it over me. As I remember it, I almost thought myself in love *au serieux*. I'll square accounts with that girl some time, and give her a lesson in manners. But no open rupture now; Aunt Sarah mustn't hear of yesterday's affair. If one of us is to leave Bristol Street, it mustn't be your humble servant."

Now Guy was in great physical need of a "bracer," as he termed it, but he thought it best to see Agatha before he left the house, and test her frame of mind as to himself.

He went to the drawing-room, where he found her dusting the piano and arranging the music, arrayed in the daintiest of caps and the most fascinating of muslin aprons. Guy had to admit that she was a delightful picture. Alas, he moralized, that such a fiery nature should be concealed beneath that fair exterior. He was spared the task of framing an introductory speech, for she was the first to offer greeting.

"Good morning, Mr. Hamilton," she said serenely, but with no trace of interest in her voice.

"Good morning, Agatha," and for the next minute or two the man felt as if he were alone in the room. Then he ventured inquiringly:

"Agatha?"

"Yes," she replied, facing him.

"I—I owe you an apology."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for yesterday's foolishness. You—you do know it was foolishness?"

"Yes, I thought so."

"I was not—not myself, you understand."

"Yes—I—understand."

"You will pardon me? You will not bear me ill-will?"

"What you really mean, I presume, is that I will not tell your aunt."

"Well—I—that is—" he stammered, taken aback by this keen penetration of his thought.

"You needn't be alarmed, Mr. Hamilton; I shall not tell her. I owe her too much to wish to cause her the slightest annoyance."

"You are not flattering to me. You would not keep silent for my sake?" he queried.

"Scarcely. Why should I? You did not for your own. If this is all you have to say, I will go on with my work."

Had Agatha seen the look of malevolence he gave her retreating figure, she would have had still further cause to distrust him. But she went about her task with a song very irritating to Guy in his present condition. He was about to say something, he knew not what—something, perhaps, he might have been sorry for, when the door opened and the butler announced in an especially funereal tone:

"The Reverend Mr. Ralph Harding."

Guy never felt any special interest in "sniveling parsons," as he called them, although this one could have put him *hors de combat* with the boxing gloves in three minutes, and less than ever did he care to see Harding at this time. So he bolted from the room

without ceremony, giving the clergyman only a nod and a muttered something in answer to his salutation.

"I'm afraid Hamilton has been going it pretty strong again," thought Harding, as he passed into the library for his two hours' reading with Agatha, "he looks as if he hadn't a friend on earth this morning; it's the old sign."

"Well, Agatha?" he said with his cheery unconventionality, as his pupil, or, as he put it, fellow student, came toward him.

"Well, Mr. Harding?" she returned in like fashion.

"It's Tennyson, I believe, this morning."

"Is it?" she said mischievously, "why, so it is. But I'm afraid I've been a bad pupil, for I have hardly touched my lesson. You will have to do all the thinking to-day."

According to their custom, he began to read aloud. He had chosen "In Memoriam," and as his fine voice rose and fell in the noble cadences of that noble poem the girl's mind could not resist a comparison of the two men who a little before had been under the same roof.

Up to yesterday there had scarcely been any points of contact between the two in her thought. The one had been the embodiment of the refinement and the courtesies of life, the gentleman without reproach in all the externals, at least, of life; the other she had liked for his genial personality, had admired for his good works and had respected for his cloth; min-

isters were a very excellent part of creation, no doubt, but they were neither picturesque nor inspiring to the imagination.

A great shock had changed her point of view completely, just as an earthquake might alter the appearance of a familiar landscape. She found herself judging the two men by that great touchstone, the use of which all must learn sooner or later—the test of character and that native gentility that is not cut out on the same system a tailor uses in shaping a coat. Applying this rule she knew, once for all, which was the true gentleman.

Although her thoughts were far away from Tennyson, these lines at last struck in upon her musings with a meaning that fairly startled her:

> "And thus he bore without abuse
> The grand old name of gentleman,
> Defamed by every charlatan
> And soil'd with all ignoble use."

"Ah, Mr. Harding," she broke in impetuously, "what *is* a gentleman? What did Tennyson mean by a gentleman?"

He was struck by the intensity of her manner and the look on her face. He felt sure that no love of literature was responsible for those parted lips and those shining eyes.

"A gentleman, Agatha? Why, my dear girl, there are as many standards as there are classes of society. My own is simple enough: first of all he is a man. Then he is a courteous man, who will not wound others' feelings without cause; he loves honor and

truth and decency. If he is refined and educated and cultured, so much the better, but these things come last."

"A man first of all!" Ah, that was the keynote of the whole matter, thought Agatha. A gentle man! He who is not a man cannot be a gentleman.

"But society——" she began.

"Yes, I know what you are going to say, Agatha. Society has a different scale of measurement, you mean. The cut of a coat, the grace of a bow, the suavity of a phrase—that's the sort of thing that makes its gentleman. But I tell you this Agatha, that between society's gentleman and God Almighty's gentleman there is a gulf of folly and untruth so wide and so deep that the one could not cross it if he would, and the other would not if he could."

He spoke with the earnestness of a prophet of old, with the eloquence of a man who feels that he has a task to perform for the good of the world. Sham, hypocrisy, untruth—these were the devils he was striving to cast out from the social body.

Agatha drank in his enthusiasm as it were an element of the air. She too had begun to feel his love for humanity, his impelling desire to be of service. She had seen the smashing of one of her idols, but she knew now that it was a false god; let him die. She was young, and the earth was fair and bright. There was work to do, and some time she would do it, and do it well. Harding would help her, she believed, and she turned to him with a beautiful look of gratitude which he did not then understand, but which he treasured long in his heart's storehouse.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

MUCH to her disgust Agatha went out too soon and strained her ankle by a long walk down Promontory Road. She was immensely exhilarated by the sweep of the wind up from the bay, the shrieking of seabirds and the tossing waters before and around her, but when she reached home she could hardly walk, and next day she was again helpless.

It was very near to Christmas before she was able to leave the house. During this time her relations with Guy were unchanged so far as the superficial observer could have noted. But there were no more of those intimate tête-à-têtes that Hamilton had come to find so desirable, no more of the stories of society life she had once drunk in with such avidity.

He had tried many times to pin Agatha to the subject of that momentous interview in the library, but in skilful, butterfly fashion she flitted away from the danger; she treated him with a deferential courtesy that was far more exasperating than downright rudeness would have been.

"A battle now and then would signify interest," he thought more than once, "but this——politeness

is enough to madden a fellow. You can't tell *what* it means."

As is the way of the male, the more distant the girl became, the more ardently he wished for her complaisance. He was angry with himself, with her and with all his world. Fits of moody depression trod hard upon the heels of hours of wild excitement, so that his club friends, at no time very squeamish, began to shake their heads and declare that he was "steaming it" in too intense a fashion. He threw himself into his "affair" with Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh in reckless and tempestuous manner, and she no longer had occasion to complain of any neglect on his part. Yet she felt that Agatha was still dominant in his mind, and her hatred of the girl was in no wise lessened.

The Worth-Courtleigh servants were not averse to discussing the matter in that style of sitting in judgment that makes them second only to our own consciences as inquisitors.

"An' I think she'll get caught yet," said Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's maid to her favored suitor, the footman, after completing a tale of especial interest.

"She'll not either; Mr. Robert'd not believe it, even if he found it in one of his own affidavys."

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh perceived with great satisfaction that the newest and most entertaining gossip was not of herself, but of Hamilton and Agatha Renier. Scandal never sprains its ankle, and she saw her own innuendoes as to that day in Fairport collect and magnify themselves into a story of definite and dark proportions. When it was repeated to

her she smiled significantly, but was non-committal; she did not propose to be made the responsible party should trouble come.

Worth-Courtleigh heard the tale in some roundabout way, and was troubled thereby, especially as he remembered what he had seen in the fields, and feared there was some basis for it.

"Lucy," he said to his wife at lunch one day, "have you heard this wretched story about Hamilton and that protégée of his aunt's? Oh, yes, I know what we saw, but that hardly accounts for the stuff now going. Somebody has added to it and circulated the thing till it's everywhere. It's a burning shame, I say."

"It *is* too bad, Robert," she replied earnestly. "I hate gossip, as you know, and yet—well, the best of us seem fond of it."

"I'll admit that some reasonably good people love to talk scandal," he said. "It is a form of their self-conceit to imagine that it makes current coin of their own virtues. But that doesn't absolve them from a share in the dirty work, at all. I'd like to hear Harding talk on it just for a while."

"Oh, Harding," she exclaimed somewhat petulantly, "Harding is a saint, of course. He is one of those absurd characters who never do anything wrong."

The lawyer laughed.

"I fancy he wouldn't care to hear you say that of him, Lucy, for he is a man and a good fellow to boot. But there are some things he doesn't stoop

to do, and tale-bearing is one of them. I wish I could say that of all my male acquaintances."

Later that afternoon Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh went down to the vestry of Saint Agnes Church, which was directly opposite the Copeland house, to help arrange for the Christmas tree to be given in combination by the parishes of Rev. Mr. Greenacre and Rev. Mr. Harding. She always felt a sense of saving grace in lending her aid to church work of this more æsthetic sort.

It was a pretty scene that met her eyes as she entered. The vestry, with its gothic arches of natural wood, its latticed windows and its cleverly concealed lights, was an interior to charm the vision. It was now made still more beautiful by long festoons of evergreen intertwined through the rafters, caught up here and there with gilt stars. At one end was a hemlock tree of generous proportions, and over it, on a long band of gilded paper, the words:

PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was greeted with proper effusiveness by the group of ladies who were engaged in arranging the toys, filling the candy bags and trimming the tree. Mrs. Greenacre, Miss Postlethwaite and Mrs. Emerson were there, as well as other members of both churches. The Reverend Mr. Greenacre was trotting about from group to group, mildly encouraging the laborers in the vineyard, but doing nothing himself. The diffident Mr. Emerson,

armed with a little wooden mallet, was breaking slabs of candy into pieces small enough to go into the little bags for the tree.

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, whose artistic sense was recognized to the full, was given the task of hanging the glittering baubles of red, silver and gold on the tree, and of disposing the gifts so that the picture should be irreproachable. The others knelt and stood about her to hand her the various articles she needed.

"We were saying just before you came," observed Mrs. Emerson with her simper, "that it's too bad dear Mr. Harding isn't married. Of course Mrs. Brown is a good soul, but a housekeeper isn't a wife."

"True," sighed Miss Postlethwaite.

"And they say he has *such* a delicate task," continued the librarian's wife, "in keeping off the women. I hear it's scandalous the advances the eldest Prudover girl—the tall one with the hook-nose, you know—makes on every occasion. They say she even ogles him in prayer-meeting."

"It is not good for man to be alone," said Mrs. Greenacre, in her deep and sententious voice. Hearing which the Reverend Archibald came very near to heresy on one scriptural text at least.

"But," interposed Miss Postlethwaite, "if he were to marry, of course he would have to stop those lessons with Mrs. Copeland's secretary—the Renier girl."

It needed but the mention of Agatha's name to turn the tide of scandal-mongering in a new direction.

All that the gathering had heard blown about the town by the wind of malice seemed to centre here in this little place of God and under the mimic star of Bethlehem.

One story was matched by another more atrocious, until, finally, poor Agatha had not a shred of reputation left her. It was even hinted that she and Hamilton had disappeared after the Fairport incident, and had not been seen for three weeks. Then Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh deemed it best to interpose. Looking down from her perch on the chair, with a sweetly smiling face, she said gently:—

"Oh, but we should not be uncharitable toward the poor girl. We should pity her. There is some excuse for her; her mother was an unworthy creature."

Mingled with murmurs of admiration for Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's magnanimity were expressed desires to hear more of the tale.

"Dear me, who was she? Tell us about it."

"Oh, no; I cannot repeat such stories. But as for her child—well," with a raising of her eyebrows and a shrug of her shoulders, "you know society must be particular, or what would become of it?"

"What, indeed?" was the chorus.

"I have always observed," said a new voice calmly, "that when one woman apologizes for a scandalous story about another, you can be almost certain that she is trying to make her hearers believe it is true."

The new comer was Mrs. Brown, Mr. Harding's housekeeper, a matronly woman who had befriended

more unfortunates than she would care to acknowledge. She had slipped in quietly, and had heard much of the talk.

"As for Mr. Hamilton and Miss Renier," she continued, "what real evidence is there that their relations have been anything but most correct?"

"My dear lady," broke in the Reverend Mr. Greenacre, with his most sacerdotal air, "when a man stoops to a woman beneath him in the social scale it is not to raise her up."

Mrs. Brown would have combated this theory to the end, had not the attention of the whole company just then been diverted by the appearance of a queer little figure at the door. It was the morsel—Susy Brent—the bit of a child who had long ago warmed Mrs. Copeland's heart by that chat in Mr. Harding's study. She was a quaint apparition, with her little woolen cap and shawl and a muff that had done its best service long ago.

"Please, ladies an' genlemen," she piped loudly, "is Mrs. Brown up here? 'Cause if she is I've got a message for her from Mr. Hardin'. Yes, I sees her now," she added, as she went to that lady without hesitation and whispered something in her ear.

"All right, Susy, I'll see to it," said the lady pleasantly. "Now wouldn't you like to look at our tree?"

The others added their invitation. Here was a chance to patronize a poor fellow-being, and they gushed over her rapturously.

If the morsel was at all excited by the unusual scene and the more than unusual attention, she gave

no sign of it. She viewed the tree with a coldly critical air.

"Why, Susy, don't you think it just be-e-autiful?" exclaimed the intense Miss Postlethwaite.

"Yes, them green things is wery pretty," replied the girl, "but they been't good ter eat, be they?"

"Oh, there'll be plenty of candy by and by," said someone.

"Candy; umph! I guess you don't know poor folkses wery well. They'd rather have a bit o' cold meat than gumdrops."

"Don't you go to church?"

"Me, mum? No. Look at me shoes an this—" holding out her pathetically patched dress.

"I should think your mother would make you go," said Mrs. Greenacre severely. "All nice little girls go to church."

"Guess ma don't set much store by churches. Pa was killed paintin' a steeple."

"Ah, my dear child; in the service of the Lord," exclaimed Rev. Mr. Greenacre with great fervor.

"That's what Deacon Snow said, but ma, she said she guessed the Lord was pretty poor pay. They'd only give her half-wages for the last day pa painted."

The rector raised his hands in horror.

"Oh, such benighted ignorance, such awful sacrilege, such——"

But his wife dragged him away to attend to some detail of decoration, and his sentence was never completed.

Susy, having duly scandalized the most of the company, retired into the background to watch pro-

ceedings. She was made happy by a bag of candy and a doll which Mrs. Brown purloined for her sake, and she began to think that after all it might be well to cultivate churches. In the midst of the chatter and the bustle, Mr. Emerson entered from the hall with direful tidings.

"S-she's c-coming!" he stammered, in great perturbation.

"Who's coming?" was the general query.

"T-that R-renier girl."

"How can you tell, my dear?" asked his wife. "You can hardly see ten feet away."

"W-well, I know it's she," he said, becoming more composed, "I can tell her by that red cloak with the black braid and frogs." This cloak was one of Agatha's favorite garments; it was, in fact, the only article of her mother's attire she had kept.

In a moment more the girl was in the room, fresh and hearty and smiling radiantly at the little party. She bore in her arms a big box containing Mrs. Copeland's offering for the Christmas tree. She seemed the incarnation of good-will and holiday cheer.

"Where shall I put it, Mr. Greenacre?" she asked of the rector, evidently regarding him as the responsible head of the affair.

"Put it on the floor, Miss er-Renier, if you please," he answered stiffly.

Agatha deposited her burden carefully and turned to speak to the others. They seemed extraordinarily busy over their tasks. Only Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was looking at her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh," she said cordially, "what a pretty effect you've made here."

The woman stared at the girl with absolute unrecognition in her eyes. She uttered not a word, but after a moment of contemptuous scrutiny wheeled about and went back to her tree.

Agatha was transfixed with surprise. Then she understood; it was a joke, of course, some new form of holiday amusement.

"Oh, I see," she laughed, "you are all pretending not to know me so that I shall have to introduce myself all around. Well, I'm Agatha Renier, at your service, Miss Postlethwaite, Mrs. Emerson, Mrs.—"

The words were frozen on her lips by what she saw. Not one of the women turned, nor paid the slightest heed to her words. They had heard, oh, yes, she knew they had heard; they had cut her under the leadership of that wonderful being, Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, who had humiliated and insulted her thus publicly. She blanched with a terrible anger that made all else in life seem trivial.

"What is the—?"

"What is the meaning of this?" she had meant to say, but at that moment her intense pride asserted itself, and she walked proudly to the door, looking neither to the right nor to the left. As she passed into the hall her red cloak slipped from her shoulders and to the floor, but she did not heed it.

"What did they mean—the cats?" she said, her intent shifting in a moment. "I'll go back and face them."

Just as she reached the inner door she heard Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's melodious voice:

"Well, poor girl, what's bred in the bone, you know; she is not responsible for her mother."

"She too!" cried Agatha fiercely, and sprang forward like a wild thing almost upon the tiny figure of a little girl, knocking her down.

"Why, you poor little mite, did I hurt you?" she asked anxiously.

"No, mum," replied Susy—for it was the morsel whom Agatha had so unceremoniously felled—"I'm used to being knocked around; our house is small for so many."

"Have you a mother?" cried Agatha passionately.

"Yes, mum," replied the wondering child.

"Thank God for her, then, dear; thank God for her!"

"Take these," said the little voice after a moment's silence. The girl held up the doll and the candy.

"These, child; why?"

"I seed you weren't to get anythin' in there, and I came out to give you them things. No, I don't need 'em, really I don't."

Tears filled Agatha's eyes and she gathered the little girl into her arms and kissed her tenderly. Then she released her with something that sounded like "Bless your big little heart, my dear," and ran swiftly across the street and into the house.

* * * * * * *

" Bless my soul, what an excitable young woman," observed the Rev. Mr. Greenacre after Agatha's unceremonious departure. " She's very pretty, though, and it's a pity she's—she's—! Come Emerson, help me with our motto; the 'Good will' is a little twisted, don't you think? Run and get the step-ladder, that's a good fellow."

* * * * * * *

Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was one of the first to leave the church. When she reached home she undid a paper parcel, took from it a crimson cloak trimmed with black braid and threw it violently across the back of a chair.

Then she sat down and wrote a note, and sent it to the Attawam Club.

CHAPTER XX

THE WHIP OF SCORN

THE five o'clock loungers at the Attawam Club that afternoon had something out of the ordinary to occupy their minds and their conversation. It had been snowing fitfully during the day, and the flakes were still lazily pirouetting in the air. The clubmen were interested.

It was not for any special love of the beauty of the feathery element nor sentiment as to its Yuletide appearance that moved the hearts of the company. The potent fact was that for years Captain Howard had offered a prize of a magnum of champagne to the first man who should reach his roadhouse each season on runners. It was a seductive prize; those who would have scorned a money reward were delighted if they could bring back the great bottle of wine to the club and make merry over its outpouring.

So the "Leather Room"—thus called because all its fittings, chairs, couches, tables, wall-hangings and carpet were of that material decoratively treated—was buzzing with talk of the snow, and bets were plentiful as to which member, if any, would bring the magnum back in triumph to the Attawam.

Guy, who had spent most of the day in these con-

genial surroundings, was one of those most interested in sleighing wagers. He had kept a watchful eye on the clouds and the snow, and his big roan mare was even now standing in a nearby livery stable hitched into a handsome cutter and guarded by James Anderson, the Copeland coachman. In an hour, Hamilton believed, there would be sufficient snow for the trip to "Howard's" but he kept his belief to himself.

At last the moment seemed propitious, and he sauntered nonchalantly into the hall in order to make a quick dash for the stable. He was just about to pass the outer door, when a messenger handed him a note. He tore it open, read it, swore roundly and left the club.

"Hang it all," he soliloquized as he drove toward the Worth-Courtleigh's, "Lucy has the most exasperating habit of turning up when she isn't wanted. What's in the wind, I wonder? 'Come to me at once, and take me somewhere!' Pretty message, isn't it, just as I was about to spring a joke on the boys? Confound it, I'll—"

His further reflections were interrupted by the sight of the cheerily lighted Worth-Courtleigh house; he hitched and blanketed his horse and rang the bell. Lucy herself came to the door.

A smile of satisfaction, of triumph even, lighted her face. It pleased her vanity to think that this big and handsome man should be at her beck and call.

But she was keen enough to note that her cavalier was in a bad state of mind. He was there unwillingly; perhaps, she reasoned with a throb of jeal-

ousy, perhaps because he had intended to meet someone else.

"Guy," she whispered tenderly, "you are not pleased. Have I—have I offended you?"

Then he told her of the wager about the first sleighing, and how her note had ruined his chances of winning the magnum. Her spirits rose at once; no woman could possibly figure in that. She cried gaily:—

"And so you think I've spoiled your plan? Don't look so disconsolate. You shall have your ride to 'Howard's,' and I'll go with you; that's all the difference."

"You?"

He looked at her wonderingly. Why was it he must always suspect some ulterior design in most of her propositions?

"Yes, why not?" she answered brightly. "Worth-Courtleigh's away, you know."

"All the fellows will be there; always are on the night of the first snow."

"What of that?"

"What of it? Great Scott, Lucy, don't you realize that they'll see you—recognize you, very likely?"

"I'll risk it. It will add spice to life and spice is what I need just now."

"But—"

"Besides, I'll bundle up so my own husband wouldn't know me. Now go, and I'll meet you at the corner of Bristol Street in ten minutes."

For three-quarters of an hour Guy paced his splendid horse back and forth near the appointed place, in no happy condition. The snow was falling rapidly, and he longed to be off for "Howard's." When Lucy at last appeared, Guy had to admit that even he would not have recognized her. Her face was enveloped in a large white "cloud" until only the tip of her pretty nose was visible. She wore a long red cloak trimmed with black braid, a garment which seemed familiar to Guy, although not exactly connected with her.

She got in and pressed close to Guy as he tucked the wolf-skin robe around her. Then the rangy mare was given her head, and they dashed up Bristol Street to that exhilarating jingling that quickens the pulses of youth and makes age envious. Past the northern mills, along by the river they sped, and far out into the open country, she chatting gaily and he answering in monosyllables. Now and then they overtook some sleighers; a "click" to the fast mare, and they were far ahead in a moment.

It was a strange ride in the dark, the snow beating on their faces, the wind rushing past their ears, their hearts filled with stormy emotions of widely different nature. It pleased neither of them, Mrs Worth-Courtleigh perhaps the less. After a few miles of it she said suddenly:—

"Wouldn't it be better to turn back now, and drive straight to 'Howard's'?"

"Oh, Lucy," he returned disgustedly, "haven't you got rid of that idea yet?"

"I'm awfully hungry, and it's altogether the best place in town," she persisted gaily.

He pulled the mare almost upon her haunches, and swung her sharply around toward the city.

"Well, if you must," he said sullenly.

He cut the roan sharply with the whip, and she sprang forward under the indignity and tore along through the loose snow.

"Howard's" was a blaze of light when they arrived, and the yard about the house was lively with sleighing parties constantly coming from the city. Guy recognized several of his club friends, who lifted their hats punctiliously, but scrutinized the well disguised woman with sardonic smiles.

"I'm safe, safe!" thought Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh with exultation. "They don't recognize me; they can't. And this cloak—ah, I can play the game to the end."

They were shown to a handsome private parlor where a fire was blazing and a dainty table set for two. Guy ordered supper, and the pair sat down cosily before the fire and spread their hands to the blaze. Under the influence of a preliminary potation Guy became quite cheerful, and forgot the unpleasant things of life. After all, why should he object to Lucy's coming here, if she herself did not? It was a jolly place, she was a pretty woman and a good supper was on the way. Existence was not so bad a thing as he had thought.

A party of his friends had a room near by, and he could hear them talking of him. "We all thought Hamilton had cleaned up the magnum," said a voice,

" when he disappeared so early. But he wasn't here when we arrived. Funny, what could have kept him."

" A woman most likely," answered someone else, and there was general laughter.

" You see they know you," said Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, with suggestive raillery, " and it *was* a woman, wasn't it, dear? But they can't guess who?"

After a most satisfactory supper Guy smoked a cigar or two, and the pair thought of home-going. But the door of the room occupied by the clubmen was wide open, unfortunately, and the risk of being detected in the glaring light was too great, even for Lucy's self-will. For an hour or more they were prisoners, until at last the striking of the clock aroused the woman to a sense of other danger.

" Eleven! I *must* get home, Guy," she exclaimed nervously. " We can manage it somehow. Hold your hat before my face, or your arm, or anything as we go by. Now!"

They glided past the open door unheeded, they hoped, for the party of roisterers within appeared too much occupied with Captain Howard's famous Christmas punch to note what was going on in the hall. But they, too, were on the point of breaking up, and they followed close upon the heels of Hamilton and Lucy. They had just time to bundle themselves into the cutter and be off as the others came down the stairs singing " Good-night, Ladies," at the top of their lungs.

" Good-night, *gentlemen*," cried Lucy mockingly,

" you'll not see us again." She had full confidence in the roan mare, and it was not misplaced. Guy took the back streets and left Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh near her home. Then he drove back to the club.

A few minutes later Lucy left her house and walked hurriedly to Bristol street. She crossed over to the vestry of Saint Agnes Church, and after looking carefully about once or twice, tried one of the windows. It yielded to her touch.

" Ah, I thought so," she said. Then she took a parcel from under her coat, slipped off its paper covering, dropped the contents upon the floor inside and shut the window.

" And now, Miss Agatha, even if you had a chance to explain, you might not find it easy," she said aloud, and with that comforting remark went home and to bed.

When Hamilton reached the Attawam he found that several sleighs laden with his cronies had just arrived from " Howard's." The jingling of bells, the neighing of horses, the shouts of stable boys, the peals of laughter, the snatches of song, the outflaring of light from every window in the clubhouse—all gave promise of a notable " night of it." It suited his mood to perfection, and, giving his horse to a club servant, he hurried into the house and ordered a lackey to call James Anderson, who was below stairs, to take the animal home.

A convivial and not altogether sober shout greeted Guy as he made his appearance in the " Leather room." It was a hubbub of reproaches, of banter,

of supposed witticisms, of invitations to drink (which the delinquent seemed to hear most clearly) and of mock-pathetic requests for light on his peculiar and unclubable conduct. He noted, with a curious feeling of resentment, that Rev. Mr. Harding was sitting in the adjoining "Quiet Room" reading as calmly as if all this din were a part of his own library. What right had a parson to come around spoiling sport by his very presence? Then and there all his latent dislike of the minister crystallized into hot and unreasoning hatred.

A servant came in and respectfully touched his elbow. "Beg pardon, sir, but Anderson is in the office, and wants his orders."

He went into the main hall, where he found the coachman, whip in hand, ready for instructions. The chaffing crowd, not to be cheated of its prey, followed, and kept up its fire of drink-inspired witticism.

"Come, Hamilton, tell us who the darling was."

"Yes, by Jove, tell us; 'fess up, old man."

"No denials; we saw you at Captain Jack's."

"Bet anybody a 'V' I know who she was," blurted a tipsy young fool, the decadent son of a respected bank president. "I know that cloak she wore, he, he, he! I've seen it before, you can bet your life."

"Two to one you don't know," shouted another reveller.

"Here, now, you fellows," growled Guy, "quit that; it's none of your——business who she was. Understand?"

"Oh, come, Ham'lt'n," hiccoughed someone pathetically, "don' shpoil th' bet. Betsh ish betsh 'tween gen'lemen."

"Name her," demanded two or three in unison.

"Well, I'll take my oath it was that pretty Agatha —what's her name," cried the youth who had offerred the "V."

"Nonsense. I've won, haven't I, Hamilton?" said the second bettor.

Guy flushed angrily.

"Find out for yourselves," he said, "I'll have nothing to do with such caddishness."

At that moment Harding entered the main hall from the "Leather Room." The sight of him roused all the worst elements in Guy's nature and completely obliterated any compunction he might have had on Agatha's account. He would humiliate this meddling parson once and for all, and he saw a clear and effective way to do it.

"It will do no harm to deny such a palpable error as that, Mr. Hamilton," said the minister, in precise and measured tones.

Guy looked him over contemptuously.

"Why do you interfere?" he asked.

"Merely as a friend in behalf of a woman; a woman who appears to need defenders," returned Harding, with a glance of scorn about the crowd.

"As a friend, eh?" sneered the other. "Well, you may as well understand that I shall not be drawn into this thing, even if you are."

"But, Hamilton, don't you see that if you don't deny it—"

"I'll neither deny nor affirm it," shouted Guy angrily. "Suppose it were she; what then?"

"*But it was not,*" said the minister with a deep solemnity that would have carried instant conviction to men in their senses. There was danger in his tone; the justice-loving heart of the man was coming to the surface, and the clergyman was fading away, but the fatuous Guy saw nothing.

"Oh, wasn't it?" he cried sarcastically. "Come Allen,"—to the second bettor—"settle; it's on you. Now open a bottle with that ten."

"You cowardly cur!" cried Harding, starting toward the slanderer with uplifted fist.

Then it was that James Anderson stepped up and laid a restraining hand on the minister's arm. "Don't, sir, don't; it's beneath you; let me," he said respectfully.

He raised his whip deliberately, and struck Hamilton a terrible blow across his fair, handsome face. A livid welt sprang to the surface.

"D—n you," yelled Guy, smarting with rage and pain, while the crowd, partially sobered by this dramatic termination of the scene, rushed in to separate the men, "you'll never use that whip again in the Copeland service."

"Right," exclaimed James Anderson, as with a swift and sudden movement he broke the stock across his knee, "I wouldn't so insult a horse."

CHAPTER XXI

THE PATH OF THE STORM

AGATHA went about her little duties next morning with a heaviness of heart that not even the white loveliness of the day could lighten. It had cleared during the night, and the sun was shining from a sky of richest blue upon a world as yet spotlessly pure.

A flock of snow-birds swept from tree to tree scattering bright powder from limb and twig, and a few of the venturesome fluttered about Agatha's window-sill, perhaps mindful of past favors. But their pretty pleading was unheeded.

The girl's grief was matched by her wonderment. She was absolutely bewildered by the blow struck at her pride and self-respect by Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh and the others. Women of their rank, she reasoned, would not stoop to such a thing without cause, and she was afraid she had unwittingly done something that merited their displeasure. If so, she could and would make amends; perhaps Guy would find out for her what it was. She might unbend to him to that extent.

But that insult to the memory of her mother! Ah! that was vile, mean, unpardonable. Nothing

that she herself had done could justify it. Anger once more ruled her softer mood, and she felt that she could see the pink and white beauty suffer any torture unmoved. But, oh, the hopelessness of it, her own helplessness. She was not an inch nearer the goal of her ambition—to force the world's recognition of her mother's goodness—than she was when Big Bess had shouted her coarse revilings down by the mill. Here in this upper stratum of society she was as impotent as before, yes, even more, for in the old days she had silenced a slander by physical fury. But what had she done yesterday? Nothing, except walk away like a tragedy queen, as if that would have any effect on women who despised her. She could have cried with mortification and despair.

She threw high her window and leaned out to the glorious air tingling with ozone from the newly fallen snow. How beautiful Nature was, how well-disposed to all her children, how free from the petty meannesses of the men and women she nurtured. Over across the street she saw the pretty little vestry nestling beneath snow-laden branches that seemed bending to give it benediction. Her resentment flamed up anew.

"And they dared," she cried aloud, "in that place they pretend to call consecrated, they dared to humiliate me and lie about my mother. And that 'servant of the Lord,' as he thinks himself—that he should stand there and not say a word for me. Ah, if Mr. Harding had been there—"

A dozen fat little birds, believing that the time for their breakfast had arrived, flew about Agatha's

head chirping lustily. She threw a few bits of bread upon the snow.

"You're greedy and quarrelsome, you birds," she said, "but I don't believe you gossip and lie about each other. If I thought you did, I'd never give you a bit of food again, never."

At that moment she perceived a neat little figure coming up the path. It was that of Nelly Nevins, the prankish schoolgirl who had made existence such a burden for Librarian Emerson on the day of the Camera Club's outing. Nelly was an honest and warm-hearted young thing who had become very fond of Agatha in their somewhat limited companionship, and whom Agatha liked in turn for her generous impulses and lack of snobbishness. She was glad to see her this morning, for she felt that the bright girl would be in some degree an antidote for her own melancholy.

"Come right up, Nelly," she cried cordially, "you know the way."

She found her little friend in a very unusual frame of mind. For a wonder, Nelly was ill at ease, and instead of the roguish questions she generally asked Agatha as to how she was getting on in "society," she seemed at loss for words, incredible as that would have been to Mr. Emerson.

"What would you do, Agatha?" she queried at last, "if you were ordered not to do something you wanted to do, and knew was all right to do, and thought you ought to do, and—oh, dear, oh, dear, I know I'm talking nonsense, but I'm the wretchedest girl—oh, you can't imagine!"

"Why, Nelly, dear," said Agatha, stroking the sunny hair affectionately, "what's the trouble? I didn't know you had a grief in the world."

"I didn't," sobbed the girl, "until yesterday afternoon."

Yesterday afternoon! At that time, too, had come Agatha's most intense bitterness. An evil coincidence, she thought. But if she herself had no comforter, she would be one to Nelly.

"Well, dear," she asked gently, "and what happened yesterday afternoon?"

Then Nelly poured forth her story excitedly. She had been told by her aunt that she must not see or speak to Agatha any more. There had been dreadful stories; Agatha had been shown to be a bad girl, and not fit for her association. Her aunt had been very severe and had ordered her to break off all relations with her friend. It was horrible; what was she to do?

Agatha listened with a face as rigid as marble and a heart turned as cold. So this inky cloud of scandal, as mysterious as it was appalling, had already enveloped her best liked girl companion.

"But," went on Nelly, "I told Aunt that I didn't believe a thing of all the stuff, that I knew you were a good girl, and that I loved you and always would. And I know why they are making such a fuss; the spiteful old cats are jealous because Guy Hamilton speaks to you."

Ah, the light; cold, cruel, pitiless, but still the light, poured from the innocent heart of a schoolgirl. In that instant the mists rolled away from before

Agatha's mind and she saw many things clearly. Not all, for she was as yet ignorant of the origin of the infamous scandal, but she could now understand Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's enmity and the scene in the vestry.

"So it is Mr. Hamilton's name they couple with mine," she said, in a strange tone that made Nelly's tears break forth again.

The girl nodded her golden head several times affirmatively.

"What do they say?"

"I wouldn't listen to them. I said they were horrid to talk about you."

"You are a dear, good girl, Nelly; I wish I had more friends like you."

"But what can I do?" asked Nelly plaintively. "If I cut you, I'll lose your respect and love, and if I don't they'll send me away to boarding-school and forbid my writing to you. So I promised I'd not come here to see you any more. That's better than being sent away off where I wouldn't be able to see you even *accidentally.*"

"You have done perfectly right, Nelly, and now that I know the reason, I shall not be a bit offended at whatever you do. We'll leave it to time, dear, and it will come out all right in the end."

After her staunch little friend had gone, Agatha quickly decided on her course of action. She went down to the library and rang for the butler.

"Will you ask Mr. Hamilton to come here a moment, John?" she said to the prim servant.

"He's not down yet, Miss."

"Please go to his room, then, and say that I wish to see him at his earliest convenience."

"Yes, Miss."

When the wondering Guy appeared, looking rather worn from his previous night's experience, the girl opened her attack without ceremony.

"There is a scandal connecting my name and yours, Mr. Hamilton; do you know what the cause of it is?"

In a dazed sort of fashion he pleaded ignorance. It was impossible, he said to himself, that she could have heard of last night's scene at the club. What else could possibly be in the wind?

She persisted. "You do not know, then, that we are being talked about unpleasantly?"

"No."

"What have I done to deserve this?"

"Nothing," he admitted gloomily.

"Then what have *you* done that subjects me to it?"

"I—I have done nothing, nothing, Agatha, I assure you."

Her lip curled with scorn and he saw a look in her eyes that he instinctively felt meant grave danger to himself.

"I feel that you are not speaking the truth, Mr. Hamilton. I shall confide in your aunt this morning."

He felt his house of cards tumbling about his ears in an instant. Once let that keen old woman interest

herself in this affair, and trouble would follow as surely as night the day. It was a catastrophe he must avert.

"You—you will tell her?" he asked pathetically.

"Everything that has occurred; all that I have heard."

"No, no, Agatha, there's a good girl; I wouldn't do it if I were you; it will cause her a great deal of pain."

"Perhaps; but I am to be considered now. I owe it to myself, my grandfather and my mother that I am cleared from this awful suspicion."

Rage for her obstinacy and the old slumbering passion for the physical Agatha blazed up together within him till he lost all sense of proportion, all power of self-control. He seized her roughly by the wrist.

"Listen to me, Agatha," he exclaimed vehemently, "it's a nasty mess, but really I'm not responsible. We can't live it down in this beastly country town. We might as well be hung for sheep as lambs. Let's cut stick, and go away together."

"I—don't—understand."

"Go away with me to a big city—New York. No one will know you there. We can change our names. Come Agatha; you know I love you; give me your answer."

All the fury of the girl's fervid temperament, all the pent-up emotion of hours of brooding burst forth in a torrent the like of which she had never known before. This was the crowning degradation—to be

made little of by such a man, to be talked to like a girl of the streets.

"Love me!" she cried, "you! And you again insult me!"

He would have uttered some further protestation, some new plea for his baseness but the words were frozen on his lips by the appearance of his aunt, grim and terrifying, on the threshold. For him the world seemed turned topsy-turvy; for Agatha an angel of light had come to be her companion.

"I will give you your answer," said the old woman icily. "Leave this house, and never enter it again. Your belongings will be sent to you."

"No, no," exclaimed Agatha in dire distress, "let me go, Mrs. Copeland."

For reply her benefactor folded her to her arms and stroked her temples compassionately. In this act of affection Guy saw the end of his hopes, the cessation of his life of ease. In the terror that struck across his soul he humbled himself before them both.

"Hear me, Aunt Sarah," he pleaded, "before you judge me in such a way. I have meant well by Agatha; I have indeed. I have been crazed by drink and—and trouble. I am willing to sink all personal pride and marry her; yes, I will give her my name, and she shall lord it over them all if she wishes. What more could a man do?"

"You have heard, my dear; shall I speak for you?" asked Mrs. Copeland.

The head on her shoulder nodded an assent.

"Then I tell you, Guy, nephew of mine though you are, that I would rather see Agatha dead at my feet than your wife. Now go; my house can be your home no longer."

Hamilton went out like one in a trance. He realized in a dull way that the pleasant thread of his life had been snapped asunder, that henceforth he was to be an alien to the noble estate he had once hoped to inherit. He strode down the path and into the street with no object in view, except, perhaps, to find a friend in his hour of need. Friends? They would be few enough once the story of his downfall should be made public. Even Claybourne would very likely turn him a cold shoulder. He directed his steps toward the club in the chance that that worthy might be there; he would tell him all his woes, and take advantage of his valuable advice.

After Guy's exit, Agatha's overtaxed brain gave way completely under the accumulation of trouble that had borne down upon her. She was seized by an attack of hysterical mirth, followed by a fainting fit of such long duration that Mrs. Copeland sent for Dr. Hackett in a great hurry.

"The girl's been overworked," said the bluff old physician, "and has been subjected to a great nervous strain of some sort. Let her get a good night's rest, and she'll be all right in the morning."

Reassured by this statement, Mrs. Copeland went away to an important engagement, leaving Agatha lying down in care of one of the housemaids. After a little she dismissed the servant and lay, with half-closed eyes, trying in some fashion to peer into her

"Now go! my house can be your home no longer."

own future. As in a dream she heard the doorbell ring, and then became aware of the presence of John, the butler. He mentioned the name of Hank Donelson, and her wandering faculties came home in an instant.

As she arose to greet the honest little sailor, Agatha was filled with dread by what she saw in his face. The grief that was so plainly pictured there spoke of still another calamity on this terrible day.

"What is it, Hank?" she asked nervously, "is anything the matter with—with——"

"Now, Miss Aggy, don't be skeered, don't be skeered," he said gently. "It may not be so bad arter all. But yer gran'ther, Cap'n Joel, has been struck down at the wheel.

"At the wheel? I don't quite know——"

"Yes, Miss Aggy. He was readin' a little note when all to onct he got dizzy like, an' fell over in his chair. The doctor says as how it's a stroke. Will ye come down as soon as ye can?"

Without a word Agatha put on her coat and hat, and beckoned Hank to follow. Then together they left the house, and hastened to the old "Harpoon."

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTAIN JOEL SAILS AWAY

AS Agatha walked to the home of her childhood, her feet ever urged onward by love and the fear of disaster, she thought of the determination she had taken that very morning to leave the mansion on Bristol Street forever, and return to her grandfather, for a time at least.

She had tested "society"—or, at any rate, certain eminent members of it—and she had found how insincere, if not evil, was its heart. How mean and shallow they all were compared with the staunch old friends of her girlish days. Only Mrs. Copeland was true, but even with her affection and confidence, Agatha had now begun to feel like an interloper in the house.

She had been the cause of the expulsion from his Eden of the old lady's only near kinsman, had aroused the bitterness of hate between those of the same blood. Oh, what a miserable failure she had been; what a wretched defeat of her dear ambitions had come at last.

Her one consolation was that her valuable experience in business and finance under Mrs. Copeland would make it very easy for her to earn a

livelihood for herself and her grandfather in better surroundings than the " Harpoon " could offer. She had wondered with a smile if she could induce the old tar to desert his beloved ship, to " strike colors," as he would put it.

But now she realized with an aching heart that the gallant soul might be called from its home by an authority that admitted of no dispute. As she hurried into the entrance of Tuckerman's wharf, her eyes sought first of all the little mast at the bow of the " Harpoon." Thank God, the flag was flying and at the top of the staff.

She was met on the deck by Dr. Hackett, who was kind, but not sanguine. He could not find it in his heart to deceive this pretty young creature, to drug her aching foreboding into temporary quiet.

He told her how serious was such an attack in an old man, that there was a chance for his partial recovery, but only a slender one. He accompanied her to the large cabin, and called old Captain Sykes from the smaller compartment where Captain Joel lay on the bunk that he would not have exchanged for the softest bed of down in Christendom.

" Poor girl," he said to the veteran, whose round face was an unwonted picture of woe, " let her be with him while she may; it will not be for long. We'll go up on deck and be within call."

Agatha crept into the little cabin with loving solicitude, but the old man heard her, for he turned his dimmed eyes to her face, and she saw in them the light of recognition. She summoned all her self-control that she might appear calm.

"Grandfather, it is I, Agatha," she said softly, approaching the bunk.

The old lips trembled into a smile, and he nodded his head slowly.

It was the girl's first coming face to face with serious illness, but her woman's heart told her what to do. She smoothed the pillow under the snowy head, and rearranged the bedclothes deftly. She took the rough hand in hers, and was rewarded by a feeble pressure of love and gratitude.

She sat down by the bedside and mournfully gazed at the splendid head brought low. Was this, then, to be the end of her new resolution? Was she to be thrust back into the life she had just decided to forswear? For the first time fate loomed up before her as an active element of existence; there were things she could not control, be she never so brave nor so honest.

The captain began to mutter indistinct phrases in delirium. She bent over to catch his words, terrified at the weird manifestation which seemed to her as the touch of another world.

His grip on her hand suddenly became strong and vice-like, so that she could have cried out with pain, had not a greater agony possessed her. After a little his babbling became intelligible.

"After him, after him, messmates," he cried, trying to raise himself upon his poor, palsied elbow, "give me the long dart—A-ah—Well struck, my hearties. So much more prize money for us all—Struck?—Who struck?—Who struck my Alice to

the heart? Eh? What coward killed my girl with his vile hand?—There—that's his face—Oh, I know you François Renier, you spawn of hell!"

In her fright at this awful vehemence, Agatha could think of but one thing to do to calm her grandfather. She drew the little gold locket from her bosom, opened it and held the face of her mother before the old man's eyes. He smiled with a touch of almost celestial sweetness.

"Yes, Alice, my dear, dear girl, I know you are pure and good. The world may have its say; we'll live and laugh at it—Miss Petticoats, too—what funny French—for a funny little tot—There, there—she can walk—Come to your old grandpa, and we'll ride-a-cock-horse."

Of a sudden this mood was in turn changed, and the captain with a supreme effort almost raised himself to a sitting posture. His face was distorted by anger.

"She do wrong—my innocent darling? How dare they? How dare they say it? Let me go and face them, and I'll——"

As he fell back exhausted, Agatha gave a little cry of horror. She thought that the angel of death had already come, and she threw herself upon her grandfather's breast.

But the end was not yet. Dr. Hackett, who had heard the noise, hurried down and reassured the girl. The old man sank into sleep from which he would probably wake, the physician said, fully conscious and rational. But this did not mean hope, he

added. He would return in an hour; meantime Hank and Captain Sykes would be on deck, if they were needed.

As Agatha looked about the larger cabin she was filled with remorse at the changed appearance of the room. Not that things had altered a great deal, but there was a lack of that divine something that comes from the touch of a woman's hand. She felt that she had been a deserter, had left an old man to his loneliness—and for what?

She was going about sadly putting things to rights when a bit of crumpled paper on a bench attracted her attention. She would have thrown it into the fire, had not an envelope on the floor near by stayed her hand. All at once she remembered what Hank had said—that the captain was reading a little note when he was stricken.

Mechanically she turned the envelope over and looked at the superscription. In full, round hand it read:—

"Captain Stewart,
"The Harpoon,
"Tuckerman's Wharf."

She looked again at the paper and saw that folded once as it lay in her hand it just fitted the envelope. Anything connected with the loved old man was of solemn interest to the girl, and she opened the letter with a feeling of awe. The words that met her eye were seared into her mind as with a red-hot brand.

If Captain Stewart loves his granddaughter, he will take her from the Copeland house without de-

lay. Her conduct with Mrs. Copeland's nephew is the scandal of the town.

Stung to madness as she was by this new attack, this horrible assault from ambush, it was some time before she fully realized the full import of the words. "The scandal of the town, the scandal of the town" kept singing themselves through her tortured brain. She shed no tears; it seemed as if that fountain of sorrow had been utterly dried up by the events of the past two days.

At last her reasoning faculties began to assert themselves, and first of all came the natural wonder who had stooped to such unutterable vileness. She examined the note with some care, and found that she did not know the handwriting; it looked forced and unnatural, and was evidently disguised. No clue was to be gained from the envelope.

She took the letter to the cabin lamp and gazed at the words as if she would extract their secret. Happening to hold the paper between herself and the light, she saw embedded in the very fabric itself the letters "A.C."

Then the paper had come from the Attawam Club; she knew that, for she remembered once hearing Guy say that the club had its stationery made to order and with the watermark of its own initials.

"Who could have done such a thing?" she asked herself over and over again. If she herself must be made a victim to someone's unreasoning hatred, was it necessary to wound the heart of a simple and inoffensive old man?

This thought filled her with a new terror. Now she understood Hank's remark to the utmost. It was this dastardly letter that had struck down her grandfather and was probably to carry him to his grave. As she thought of what it meant to be bereft of her brave and tender-hearted old protector, she could have killed the unknown author of the calumny and cheerfully have suffered whatever penalty the act entailed.

A movement in the bunk attracted her attention. Crushing the letter in her hand, she turned and, looking into the little room, saw her grandfather feebly trying to beckon to her. She was at his side in a moment.

"Aggy, dear," he whispered.

"Yes, grandfather, I am here. I shall always be here now. I shall not leave you any more."

"No, dearie, you will not leave me; I am the one who is going. My course in this world is pretty near sailed. I'm going to start on the great v'yge."

"Oh, no, no, grandfather, you mustn't say such things," sobbed the girl.

"It must be; the orders have been given. I'd like to stay for—for you, but the Captain says not."

He tried to raise himself up, and looked about anxiously as if in search of something.

"What is it, grandfather? What do you want?" asked Agatha.

"I—I—dropped a scrap of paper in the cabin a while ago. I'd like to find it."

"Is it this?" asked Agatha, holding up the letter.

"Yes," he replied, with a searching look before which she lowered her eyes. "Have you read it?"

She bowed her head.

"Poor, dear child. Too bad, too bad!"

"Grandfather! You do not——"

"How can you hint at such a thing?" he said sternly. "I a mutineer against my own flesh and blood? Of course I knew it couldn't be, my precious."

"Thank God for that," she exclaimed with fervent tears.

"Aggy."

"Yes."

"What was that poem you read me the last time you were down here? The one about a pilot, you know. Say the lines about the pilot."

> "I hope to meet my Pilot face to face
> When I have crost the bar."

repeated Agatha, in a voice broken with grief.

"Yes, that's it. My pilot is here already; he's waiting for me to get aboard. He's standing there —there—behind you. I can't see you now; so dark, and it's yet early—tell them to light the masthead lantern—I—I—Agatha, where are you?"

"Here, grandpa."

"There, that's a good girl; you always were a good girl. Kiss me. God ble——"

With a deep sigh the noble old mariner set out upon that last mysterious voyage which mortal hand has never yet charted, and from which no ship returns to port.

Agatha looked helplessly for a moment at the still face before her. Then comprehension gradually crept into her face. She gently forced apart the fingers that held the letter, and secreted it in her dress. In another moment the full flood of her sorrow rushed in upon her, and with a long cry of agony she fell prostrate upon the floor.

Hank Donelson and Captain Sykes clambered down the companionway with blanched faces. They knew too well the meaning of that scream. From the figure on the floor they looked to the white features in the bunk.

" My God," blubbered Sykes, " Joel's sailed away, an' we weren't here to say good-by."

Hank said never a word, but with tears rolling down his ruddy cheeks stole up on deck and out to the bow. There he hauled the flag down to the deck, walked slowly around it three times, and then raised it solemnly to half-mast.

A self-appointed and tireless sentinel, he paced the old " Harpoon " until a glow in the east proclaimed the birth of a new day.

CHAPTER XXIII

A WOMAN SCORNED

THE two old sailors had at first thought Agatha dead, as well as her grandfather, when they found her prostrate on the floor of the "Harpoon's" cabin. They gazed at her with awe, neither of them venturing to touch the beautiful white face or to raise the shapely body from its hard resting-place.

Dr. Hackett's bustling entrance roused them from their mournful inaction, his warmly human personality cheering their distressed souls as by magic; so deep was their simple faith in his power that they would not have marveled very much had he restored their friend to life.

The physician's practised eye saw at once that their duty was to the living—the girl upon the floor. The calm face in the bunk spoke of peace eternal. He applied some simple restorative to Agatha, and soon the warm tide of life flowed back from her heart, but she awoke to but a dim realization of the tragedy about her. Her brain had yielded to the intensity of the strain put upon it, and she smiled vacuously at her distressed old friends.

"Grandpa is asleep," she whispered, "and we

must make no noise; he is so easily disturbed. I think I will go to bed, too."

The arrival of Mrs. Copeland at this juncture relieved Captain Sykes of a great load of anxiety. She had been thoroughly frightened when she returned home to find Agatha gone away in her condition, and had bidden James to drive with all despatch to Tuckerman's wharf. She now stood as a ministering angel in the cabin of the "Harpoon."

She led the unresisting girl to the carriage, into which Anderson lifted her with tender respect. There Agatha swooned again, and when home was reached she was in a state of complete collapse.

As the girl's clothing was loosened, the fateful note dropped upon the floor. Mrs. Copeland felt that she was entitled to read it, and she did, to her horror and amazement. She, too, discovered the "A.C." watermark, and her first thought was of Guy. She thrilled with shame and indignation that a man could make so vile a thing of himself for the sake of future expectations. But she could conceive of no one else with a shadow of motive, or perhaps a heart black enough, for such a horrible assault.

Dr. Hackett pronounced Agatha's illness brain fever, and he had difficulty in saving her life. For days her faint spirit hovered on the borderland, then came back to earth. During the anxious weeks Mrs. Copeland played the nurse with a loving patience and solicitude that recalled other days in her life. She came to love the girl more than ever. Few could have withstood Agatha's almost pathetic grati-

tude and her desire to get well that she might be of service again.

As the girl slowly came to her strength, the good doctor interposed with brusque familiarity. She must have complete change of scene, he said, must go from Old Chetford for an indefinite period if her complete recovery were to be expected. The continuance of old associations would be disastrous, he insisted. Mrs. Copeland approved of the idea, and, in pursuance of her plan, went to Worth-Courtleigh's office one day to make arrangements for the care of her property during any length of time she might stay away. She trusted the hard-headed lawyer implicitly, and she gave him full power of attorney to act in her behalf in any business matter.

"By the way, Mrs. Copeland," he said, when the important details had been settled, "I find in looking over Captain Stewart's affairs that the old man assumed some obligations—in Agatha's interest, the poor old fellow thought, I suppose—that must be paid directly. What do you think it best to do?"

"I'll pay it at once; what's the amount?" asked the lady, drawing her check-book from her satchel.

But even as her pen was dipped in the lawyer's ink, a second thought came to her. She realized that Agatha's peculiar pride might rebel at any payment of her grandfather's debts without her knowledge, and she closed the check-book with a snap.

"*That* won't do at all," she exclaimed, "I ought to have known better."

"I think," said Worth-Courtleigh, "that we'd better sacrifice sentiment and sell the 'Harpoon.'

Agatha cannot use it any more, and it would just about square things up. The other little property of Captain Stewart's I find I am not able to touch for the purpose."

"Well, I suppose that is best," returned she with a sigh. "The ways of the world are not the ways of sentiment."

It was during this period that Mr. Harding justified all Mrs. Copeland's faith and regard. He was a tower of strength to the house, and his cheery presence and entertaining chat did much to help Agatha on to recovery. He, most of all, noticed the immense change in the girl. Physically she was wan, listless and bereft of all her old rounded prettiness; spiritually she was a different Agatha. No more of the old exuberance was visible, yet she was still as kind and considerate as ever. But there was a touch of hardness, a suspicion of pessimism, that he did not like to see.

"The crucible of suffering has refined her nature," he thought. "I hope it has not embittered her past all sweetening."

Once when some visitor chanced to mention Guy's name, he saw a hatred burn in the brown eyes and set the fine features into something that almost appalled him.

As for the man who had wrought this great change, he had declined to accept his dismissal from the Copeland mansion as final. That his allowance had not yet been stopped he looked upon as a favorable omen, and he made several attempts to see his aunt, but with no success. James Anderson had been

temporarily installed as butler, during an illness of the solemn John, and Guy had little inclination to attempt to force his way into the house. He haunted the club perpetually, but his morose spirit and excesses in liquor caused him to be let alone there. Even Claybourne avoided him.

When Agatha was well enough, Mrs. Copeland told her gently about the proposed selling of the "Harpoon." She approved the plan, for, while grateful for Mrs. Copeland's offer of assistance, she felt that her grandfather would not have wished it otherwise.

At first she did not take kindly to the suggestion of going abroad; she felt that she should stay and face the little world of Old Chetford, that it was beneath her moral courage to run away under fire. She said as much to her benefactress.

"But Paris, child, Paris," the old woman exclaimed.

Ah, Paris! The city of her childish dreams, the vision of her artistic nature, and above all, the home of her ancestors! Perhaps—but she had seen so many air castles vanish into the impenetrable ether that she checked herself; henceforth she would deal with the hard, common-sense facts of life. Yet Paris won her, nevertheless, and she made preparations for going.

Harding advised the exodus with all the earnestness of his sincere nature. In doing this he was tugging at his own heart-strings, for he knew that with the departure of Agatha and Mrs. Copeland much of his own interest in life would go, too. But

he felt it best that Agatha should grow to complete womanhood away from Old Chetford, the scene of such tremendous shocks to her faith in human nature.

One day, at Agatha's request, Harding drove her over to Mill River, and in a little old church there they found the record of the marriage of Alice, daughter of Joel Stewart, and François, only son of Adolph Renier, Count de Fornay. The minister witnessed the copy of the record before a notary, and Agatha took possession of the paper. When asked by Harding what she meant to do with it, she would only say:—

"The day may come when I shall need it."

Just before Mrs. Copeland and Agatha were to start for New York, whence they were to sail for France, Guy made one last desperate attempt to see his aunt. To his great joy he was admitted to her presence. The old lady wasted no time in greetings, nor did she allow Guy to enter upon his intended plea of mercy. Going straight to her desk, she brought out the "A.C." note, and thrust it before his eyes.

"Did you write that?" she asked slowly.

"To whom?"

"To Captain Joel Stewart; they say it killed him."

Guy read with ever deepening astonishment and horror. He began to see the enormity of the crime against the girl, and he was fairly stunned by the discovery.

"Upon my soul, Aunt," he declared earnestly, "I had nothing to do with it—know nothing of it.

You surely cannot imagine that I would stoop to such a thing as that?"

She made no reply, but looked at him in her cold and searching way. Then she bade him an emotionless good-by, and he left the house.

He hurried to Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's with new foreboding heavy in his heart. Could she have done this thing, and, by its terrible consequences, have added to the wrecking of his fortunes? It was almost incredible, but he would have the truth.

The woman's exultant face when he told her of the note and its results, was enough; she was self-condemned before a man who was himself no pattern of morality, but whose gorge rose at such vileness.

"Great God, Lucy," he whispered hoarsely, "you don't mean that you—you wrote——"

"Yes, I did write it. Hadn't I cause? I hated the brat, and I hate her now."

He stared at her in silence for a moment.

"You are worse than I thought you, Lucy," he said slowly.

"Oh yes, of course! Because I have made it uncomfortable for the doll of a girl you are in love with. Ah, that's the truth, and you wince don't you? So now she's going away, and you're in mourning, coming up here to do the Pharisee over me. You'll have time enough to get used to being without her, for she'll not come back in a hurry, I fancy."

"Yes, time enough," he cried in a storm of anger, "and all through you. But I'll not have time to

come here again, for, by heaven, I've had enough of you."

And then, despite the pleading of the woman, in whom anger had been succeeded by the fear of losing her all, he left the house of Robert Worth-Courtleigh never to enter it again.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT HANK DONELSON'S

THE Rev. Mr. Harding sat in his study on the Saturday evening after the departure of Mrs. Copeland and Agatha, gazing at his open fire of big hickory logs, and musing on many things as his eye was held by the flame-pictures that danced into view and away like some mysterious panorama moved by elfin hands. His most cherished pipe was in his hand, but it was often forgotten in the larger emotions of the hour.

Chiefly his thoughts were of the lovely girl whose wan smile as she had bidden him an earnest farewell at the station was vivid in his memory, and was long to remain there unchallenged. Of her restoration to health and bloom he had no manner of doubt; he only feared that no medicine and no new interests could ever quite bring back the beauty of innocent faith in the goodness of the world that had once so distinguished her. She had changed utterly from a trusting girl to a reserved and self-centred woman, as a sensitive plant closes at the touch of a rough hand.

"The iron has entered her soul, and it rankles. Poor child. She has a long path of shadows to travel before she gets into sun-land again. When

she does—well, it will be worth some man's while to be there to see the unfolding of her nature."

He took a last critical look at the sermon that was ready for to-morrow's preaching. "And the greatest of these is charity" stood out in bold handwriting on the first page of the manuscript.

"Umph; I'm afraid," thought the clergyman, "that the human shell is quite as much in need of charity as of any other divine attribute. We all agree in theory, but as for practice—ah, we differ as violently as the doctors of different schools, except that we are prone to be homeopaths, and give as minute doses as possible."

As he read, the vision of that Agatha of other days would come before the written words, spite of every endeavor. He saw her brilliant, vivacious, sweetly imperious, as she was, he remembered, when with shining eyes she had asked his definition of a gentleman. The scene of the little festival in the cabin of the "Harpoon," where she had blushingly announced her intention of becoming a great lady, was still vivid before him. How soon had his prophecy of the disillusioning come to pass. He tossed the sermon on the table, and arose to pace back and forth before the fire.

"A proud creature," he mused again, "she even preferred to sell her beloved old 'Harpoon' rather than accept help to pay her grandfather's debts—I believe I'll go down to see Hank and find out what's been done in the matter. The cold air will blow the cobwebs out of my brain, anyway."

The Donelsons lived in a quaint little wooden

house on a quaint little cobble-paved street near the water-front. The windows gave immediately upon the narrow sidewalk, and as Mr. Harding reached the door he saw a queer picture within. Hank's little legs were stoutly spread apart, like those of a diminutive Colossus of Rhodes, in the attempt to stretch a "hooked" carpet that was being laid by his sister Tilly who was doubled up like a jackknife, driving tacks.

The sitting-room, where this ceremony was in progress, was a tiny, low-studded apartment with white wood wainscoting reaching as high as a man's waist, and walls of fantastically stenciled figures of impossible birds flitting about amongst weird scrolls. Just now it was rather devoid of furniture, but on the broad mantel over the ancient iron Franklin stove was a heterogeneous collection of china dogs, wax flowers, worsted cushions and sea-shells, articles dear to the female heart of Tilly's kind. In full dress the room boasted a black walnut "what-not" in a corner devoted to curiosities, a set of slippery haircloth furniture, a tall diamond-windowed bookcase and a fine round centre-table of mahogany, the gift to Hank from an old captain to whom he once had been of service. Over the place this usually occupied was now suspended Nicodemus, the parrot.

Tilly greeted the clergyman with proper respect, but no enthusiasm.

"Howdy do, Parson," she mumbled, her speech being somewhat impeded by a mouthful of tacks. Hank was more cordial, and evinced a disposition to knock off work in honor of the visit.

"Now, you, Hank Donelson," sputtered Tilly through the tacks, "you jest keep right on stretchin' this ere carpet, 'cause the best room's got to be ready for Sunday, minister or no minister."

"Quite right, Tilly," assented Harding smilingly, "business before pleasure every time. Cannot I help you in some way?"

"Wall, ef you want to be useful, jest git a chair an' put it in the middle of the carpet, then set on it as hard as you can. When I say 'push,' you put yer heel in an' shove the carpet toward me like all-possessed."

"I'll try," replied the clergyman with due meekness, as he took his seat and waited the word. He was amused at Hank's awkward efforts to drive tacks, and the deep interest that Nicodemus seemed to take in the operation.

The bird was sympathetic, too, for once when Hank missed his aim and hit his fingers an exasperating blow, Nicodemus swore roundly and thereby earned the little tar's deep gratitude.

"Yer see, Parson," he said, "I couldn't very well cuss with you in the room; but that ere bird, he knows the ways o'sailors, havin' lived among 'em in his youth, an' he helps a messmate out amazin'. I hopes as how ye'll excuse him, for in course he don't know as how ye're a minister; ye don't dress like one, ye know."

Harding laughed heartily. "Well, Hank," he said, "Nicodemus isn't the only creature that fails to recognize a clergyman except by his black coat and white choker; I found that out a long time ago."

Between hammer taps and Mr. Harding's "pushing forward" on the carpet there were bits of conversation, and, as a matter of course, the talk at last centred upon Agatha. Hank's fear lest she should become "Frenchified," and learn to "eat frogs" was almost pathetic; the simple-hearted little fellow could scarcely comprehend the ethical lesson of the girl's departure. But the shrewder and more worldly-wise Tilly understood, and was not slow in uncorking the vials of her wrath on Old Chetford society.

"Hain't them big-bugs nothin' better to do," she asked angrily, "than to gad 'round tellin' lies 'bout a good gal like Aggy Renier, whose little finger's wuth the hull kit an' boodle of 'em? They'd have enough to do to hum, most of 'em, ef they'd only stay there. There's a lot o' glass houses up on the 'Hill,' an' thin ones at that."

She emphasized her points by vigorous flourishes of her hammer, and once or twice unthinkingly hit Hank's neat little boots as a means of laying special stress on her remarks. He was glad of the diversion which came presently.

It was Susy Brent, the morsel, who suddenly stood in the doorway, as if she had arisen through the floor. It was characteristic of Susy that one never heard her approach. She held a cup in her hand, and looked appealingly at the angular mistress of the house.

"Come to borry somethin', eh?" said Tilly sharply. "I knew it; your ma ain't forehanded."

"I guess she's glad she ain't, 'cause then she'd

have ter do twict as much work. Say, *wuz* they ever any four-handed folks?"

"Oh, Lord," ejaculated Tilly, "the ignorance o' them mill people! What is it you want this time?"

"Ma said ef yer *could* spare a cup o' merlasses—Billy's been cryin' fer somethin' sweet all day, an'—"

"There, there, child, of course I'll spare it," said Tilly, relenting. And she went to get the desired commodity.

As she left the room, Nicodemus sent after her retreating figure a volley of execrations that fairly startled even the case-hardened little Susy.

"My, wot a awful bird!" she exclaimed. "Don't yer do nothin' to him when he talks so, Mr. Donelson?"

"Well, Tilly she whips the critter when he cuts up wuss nor usual; an' he don't dare to cuss much when she's near. But onc't let her go out'n the room, an' he rips out blue blazes. Howsumever, he don't mean any harm by it, an' otherwise he's durn good company. So I allus begs hard when Tilly threatens to sell him."

Harding, whose fancy had been taken long ago by the eerie little daughter of the mills, spoke to Susy kindly, and soon had her completely at ease. Something they said must have suggested Agatha to the girl, for she suddenly asked:—

"The pretty young lady on the 'Hill'—her as used to live in the 'Harpoon,' an' work in Number One—hain't she gone away?"

"So *you* know that?"

"Yes; she's gone on a big ship, they say. I'm sorry, I am; she wuz kind to me."

"She is kind to everybody."

"Yes, I guess she is. An' everybody had ought to love her, hadn't they? Do *you* love her?"

This matter-of-fact question from a child thrilled Harding through and through. It was more than he had hitherto dared ask even himself. Now he felt like crying out his answer: "Yes, I do love her; I love her with all my heart and soul; I shall always love her!" But as men will, he held his peace, and gave himself up to his riotous thoughts.

"Well, *I* loves her," said Susy, after regarding him solemnly for a time. "Why did she go away?"

"She has been very ill."

"Spects she got cold up to the Chris'mas shindy at the church."

"Oh, you *were* there, weren't you?"

"She went home widout her pretty red cloak. How I'd like one," she sighed. "I wuz a-goin' to take it over to her house, but Mrs. What's-her-name took care of it and wrapped it up nice in paper."

"A red cloak?" asked Harding vehemently, as a great light began to shine in upon him. "Who took it, Susy? What was her name?"

"I can't remember. But she's the stylish, red-haired lady wot lives in the lop-sided big house on Thorn Street."

"Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh!" exclaimed the minister, jumping to his feet with an air of sudden conviction.

Susy's surprise at this very unusual exhibition of excitement from a clergyman was cut short by the call of Tilly from the entry:

"Here's your molasses, you wretched mite."

Out in the dark hall a wonderful thing happened to the little girl. Her hands and pockets were filled with cookies, and then she was kissed and pushed out of the front door. As Tilly reentered the sitting-room she rubbed her eyes with her apron, and declared that coming into the light from the dark "always did make 'em run water."

When the carpet had been laid to the prim lady's satisfaction, Mr. Harding took Hank out for a little walk. They conversed earnestly together for some time, then separated with a hearty handshake.

CHAPTER XXV

SOCIETY IS SCANDALIZED

ACCORDING to that harsh way Mother Nature has of filling the minds of her children during the night with the unpleasant things of the day, Ralph Harding's sleep, after his return from Hank's, was vague, confused, troubled. Once he seemed to be on a vast, gray, windy plain, ever pursuing a phantom with a red cloak, and urged along by a wee scrap of a girl, who tugged at his hand with superhuman strength, and dragged him ever faster and faster till his feet at last left the earth. He awoke panting, and with a heavy weight at his heart that he at once recognized as an established acquaintance; it would be there many days, he feared.

Sleepless hours succeeded his sombre dreams, and again and again the whole history of the past weeks surged through his mind. It was most pitiful; the pure and generous Agatha had gone away, forced from her home by the vile conspiracy of a woman who was still honored and happy—if such a woman could be happy. He knew that Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh was the principal in a deep-laid plot to destroy the reputation of an innocent girl. That night of violence at the club was all plain now. This woman

was Hamilton's companion on the sleigh ride and at "Howard's," and she wore Agatha's red cloak. That she was able to get possession of the garment was all due to the malice and uncharitableness of church people in a house of God! How did wheels work within wheels for the crushing of a blameless spirit.

Poor Worth-Courtleigh, too! With knowledge of the wife's baseness in one respect came conviction of her infidelity with Hamilton. Harding felt that such an honest-hearted gentleman ought to know the truth, and yet he would not have been the one to tell him.

The minister arose unrefreshed; nor did the keen loveliness of the morning work any change in his mental burden. The walk to the church, during which he met many of his parishioners whom he knew had helped circulate the scandal, wrought his feelings to a high pitch of nervous excitement, so that when he reached the house of worship he was like some prophet of old stirred by the evil of the world to deliver a denunciation from God.

The Third Congregational Church was a plain, square structure of wood, clapboarded and painted white, and having green blinds at its small windows. The ground floor was occupied by the vestry, where Harding had occasionally given little dramatic entertainments and had shocked some of the more uncompromising of his flock. The main auditorium above, reached from the street by a U-shaped pair of stone steps, was of antique simplicity. The pews were boxed in, and guarded by doors, which Hard-

ing had recently determined to abolish, if possible, as savoring too much of exclusiveness, which he detested. Only the magnificent old high pulpit of mahogany had any touch of beauty or grandeur.

The church was well filled, as usual, when Mr. Harding entered the pulpit. The eloquence and originality of his sermons had long been recognized in Old Chetford and beyond, and that he was sometimes considered "eccentric," always drew strangers to the Third Congregational. But those who knew him best noticed this morning that there was an unfamiliar look upon his face and a peculiar sound in his voice as he read the hymns. His prayer was brief, mainly expressing the earnest hope that the Great Pattern of charity and love might find exemplars in all the world.

As the minister rose for his sermon and nervously opened his manuscript—which was merely for occasional reference, as he always preached from memory—his eye fell upon Guy Hamilton sitting in a pew well in front and to the left. The man was debonair, well groomed, faultlessly dressed, the perfect picture of a member of high society in proper Sunday attitude. He was a visitor with the family of a wealthy merchant, and he sat beside the handsome daughter of the house, complacent, self-satisfied, and seemingly happy.

A flood of bitterness swept over the preacher's soul as he saw this woman, fashionably dressed, radiant and honored, sitting beside this man, and then thought of the sad-faced girl driven across the seas by the undeserved scorn of some of these very

people to whom he was about to deliver a sermon on charity. Charity! What charity had they for her in the hour when she needed it most? He felt that he could not bring his lips to utter the conventional words he had prepared for his flock; this Other who had come in with his moral leprosy and his fair exterior had aroused a fire of emotion that must burst forth in burning words not penned in the quiet of the study. He would speak what was within him, let the consequences be what they might. He would go back to the old dispensation, smiting and sparing not.

He thrust his sermon aside, and rapidly turned the leaves of his Bible for a moment. He stopped at the Book of Proverbs, and in a voice kept calm only by the greatest effort he read with deep and deliberate solemnity these words:—

"The lip of truth shall be established forever: but a lying tongue is for a moment."

"Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counsellors of peace is joy."

He began by speaking about evil reports, how they traveled on the wings of the morning, and how they were believed more readily than good words. Let one be accused of something bad, he said, and the world accepts it as a new gospel; let good deeds be reported by some kindly soul and people are forever poking about with their muck-poles to discover an improper motive behind the acts.

Then, with ever increasing eloquence and fire, he described the power of scandal to blight and ruin, even if it dealt wholly in untruths.

"I am firmly persuaded," he declared, "that instead of believing a story false that ought not to be true, society's course is to accept as true everything evil, even if false.

"We have our laws and our jails for the corrupters of the body politic, but I say to you that the worst enemies of decency are the pedlers of malicious tales. And none but those who love to hear scandal like to tell it. Many a man has been hanged, many a woman has been imprisoned who did less mischief than the coiners of forged stories.

"The object of scandalous reports is generally helpless, for he has an army arrayed against him, an army of gossip-mongers, whose ranks are ever swelling and whose tents always encompass him about.

"I stand upon this: that gossips are murderers as vile as the slayers of human beings, for they murder reputations with no other object than to kill time; worse than thieves, for they rob people of their good name, a possession that profits the thieves not at all."

In the little pause that followed this period there was an uneasy stirring of the congregation, and the people looked at one another in blank amazement. What had this strange minister of theirs in mind that he should forsake the beaten path of beauty of diction and polish of style for such simple, direct and earnest admonition? Was this but generalization, or was it the prelude to some tremendous personal denunciation that should shake the church from foundation to spire? But whatever

was to come, the magnetism of the man fixed every eye upon the pulpit.

"Oh, men and women," continued the speaker, "I would to God I could adequately picture to you the sufferings of the victim of unjust scandal. Such a victim has just been driven from amongst us. Some of you know the one to whom I refer; the rest are probably aware of the facts, for when scandal-mongers triumph they are quick to proclaim their victory. Innocent or guilty, the result is generally the same, if the target of malice is a woman.

"Innocent or guilty," he cried, his fine voice trembling with emotion, "that girl is to-day an outcast!"

So this was the application! The "victim" was all but named, and few in the church did not know the story of Agatha Renier. Guy Hamilton suddenly became the central figure in the sanctuary, and he flushed deeply as he felt his disagreeable prominence. He cursed the hour when he had allowed himself to be put in the power of this fearless minister who had more than once shown animosity toward him; he even hated the pretty girl at his side as the means of his wretched predicament.

Among the others there was a tense silence, a dread and yet an eager desire to know where the thunderbolt of the preacher's righteous wrath would next descend. They were not long in doubt.

"That girl is to-day an outcast," he repeated in ringing tones; "were she to enter this church this morning for the consolation of the spirit of God,

which one of you would invite her to your pew? How many of you would not gather your garments about you in fear of contamination if she but touched their hem.

"But the man—what of him? If you meet him after this service, as many of you doubtless will, will you fail to smile upon him, to invite him to your houses? Will you, fathers, warn your boys against him? Will you, mothers, close your doors to him when he comes to visit your beloved daughters?

"Yet if guilt there was, why does he go free? And the woman—why is she driven from among you? If there was no guilt, it was he, not she, who assumed its hideous mask. And yet your smile for him will be as bright as your chilling glance at the victim of his deceit is black. You will say: youth—male youth—must have its fling. You will plead custom, convention. Shame upon such custom! Horror for such convention!

"I tell you, my people," he thundered, stretching his right arm toward heaven, *"at the judgment bar of God there is no sex in sin!"*

Though there was more of the sermon, somewhat along the lines originally planned, that was the climax, poured out from a generous heart overflowing with the passion for humanity, and touched, too, by a man's depth of tenderness for a woman who had been misjudged and wronged. It was a union of love and conviction and a great sense of duty that no man could resist. That hour was to many the culmination of Harding's career in Old

Chetford, the time when his eloquence was most thrilling, the moment when his strength bore down upon their souls with most profound effect.

But there were many, and especially of the more rich and powerful set, who were scandalized beyond measure at what they termed their pastor's unwarranted abuse of society, his pointed insult to a man of position, his almost indecent reference to things their daughters ought never to hear mentioned. As the congregation came out into the brilliant sunshine, few stopping to shake their pastor by the hand as formerly, the comments on the sermon spoke clearly enough of its unpleasant effect. There were threats of secession, hints at parish meetings and suggestions of dire discipline for the minister who had dared go beyond his province as a servant of the Lord. The few who believed him in the right were overawed by the carriages and fine garments of the indignant section, and quietly went their homeward ways on foot.

So, too, went the Rev. Ralph Harding to his study, filled with a grim satisfaction he had not known for many days. He believed that he had spoken—or, rather that a higher power had spoken through him—truths that would one day bear a rich fruitage. Of the immediate consequences of his daring he concerned himself not at all as yet.

He sat down at his table to write a letter. Three times he half-filled a sheet, and as many times he tore up what he had written, and threw the pieces of paper into the fire.

CHAPTER XXVI

MODERN CHIVALRY

HARDING was early afield next morning looking after the details of a new plan he had devised to help the wage-earners of the city to habits of greater frugality. This was a penny savings-bank that he had induced one of the strong financial institutions of Old Chetford to establish as a sort of branch of its regular business. On his way down town he met "Tom" Harrington, who had promised to assist him.

"Morning, Harding," said that sleek and well-fed financier, "hope you're all right after—— yesterday. Awful row all over town on account of your sermon. You meant well, I know, but I may as well tell you in a friendly way that your position on such matters has created enmity in the church, great enmity. I sympathize with you in all your efforts to do good, but——"

"How about the penny bank business, Harrington?" asked the minister, wholly ignoring the matter of the sermon, "can you give me that help you promised for this morning?"

"Eh? The bank? Oh, yes, I remember. But to tell you the truth, Harding, I'm not quite prepared to go ahead with the matter to-day. I shall

want a little time to look into it further. Come around in a week." And the pompous banker strode away to his private office, the picture of self-content and prosperity.

The minister's disgust at this easily understood cooling on the part of Mr. Harrington was quickly ended by the sight of Robert Worth-Courtleigh coming down the street to his business. Here was a man he could rely on, he thought, with a feeling of thankfulness that the world was not wholly filled with shams.

"How are you, Harding," said the lawyer heartily, with a warm grip of the hand," you're just the fellow I wanted to see. I've got the deeds by which Mrs. Copeland gives your association the land and building of the Coffee House and I want you to have them now."

He fumbled in his coat pockets with a perplexed air, but no papers were forthcoming.

"By George," said he, "I've left them in my other coat, after all. But I'll go right back and get them and drop into your study with them on my way down."

"Don't go back on my account, Robert," returned Harding, "any other time will do. I'll admit that I'm like a child that's been promised a new toy, but I don't want to put you to any trouble."

"No trouble at all, Harding; besides, I've left some of my own papers, too, and I must have them. I'll see you later perhaps."

When the lawyer reached home he went directly to his desk in the library. Lying upon the broad,

clean blotter he saw one of his wife's pretty squares of note-paper filled with her large and bold handwriting. He would have quietly put it one side unread, but that the word "Dearest," with which the epistle began, thrust itself upon his sight.

"Ah, to me," he said softly, "what a queer child Lucy is to be sure." Then he read on.

"You will be surprised, I know, at my writing you——"

"Well, it *is* unusual; wants a new dress or a string of pearls, I suppose."

"But I feel that I cannot wait till I see you before I speak——"

"It certainly is pearls."

"I may be doing a foolish thing, but I feel I must tell you. You know that I love you. I have given you ample proof of that, but——"

"But what?" thought the lawyer, with some misgiving, as he turned the sheet.

"I fear that you have never really returned my feelings. But I tell you, Guy Hamilton, I will not be thrown aside like a discarded glove. I——"

Here the letter ended abruptly, and the ink of the final word was scarcely dry.

The first effect of a tremendous shock upon an exceptionally strong man is often that of dazed astonishment and a refusal to credit his own senses. So it was with Robert Worth-Courtleigh. He turned the letter mechanically and dully read it again.

As the full force of its terrible meaning gradually swept in upon his brain, a purple flush spread over

his face like that of a man in apoplexy; then succeeded an ashen hue and a weakness that made him clutch the desk for support. He sank into his chair and bowed his head on his arm, grasping the letter in one hand as if it were some animate thing whose life he would strangle out.

So his wife found him when she hurried back to finish the note from which she had been called by a servant. The unexpected sight of him at that desk, the thought of what must have happened, threw her into a panic of apprehension.

"Oh—Robert," she screamed, "how—you—startled me. Are you—ill?"

There was no answer from the bowed figure. She would have thought him dead, perhaps, but that his right hand trembled as it clutched the damning note. At the sight of the bit of blue paper she knew that the hour of reckoning had struck. She turned to go, with a great desire to postpone the evil moment, but her husband heard her, and slowly raised his head.

For one brief moment the drawn and haggard face and the sudden collapsing of his figure into a counterfeit of old age aroused within her a sharp pang of remorse and regret, such as a woodsman might feel when he has felled a great and noble tree. It was as transitory, however, for there followed a rushing flood of defiant indignation as she realized that this man held her at his mercy. His very silence increased her bitterness. They looked at one another like strangers, until her passion could no longer be withheld.

"Well," she cried, "you have read—have dared to read my private correspondence."

"Would to God I had not, Lucy," he answered slowly, "Heaven help me, I thought—I thought it was for me."

"A likely story," she sneered. "Well—what do you propose to do?"

"To do?"

"Yes; with—me? With—him? With—everything?"

At this the man within him asserted itself, the lawyer training proved its strength, and Worth-Courtleigh faced his wife with dignity and courage.

"There is but one thing to do, Lucy," he said. "You may—you must stay in this house. There is no other protection for you. But remember you stay not as my wife, but as my guest whose residence with me the law permits. As such your wants will all be provided for, and you will be allowed a sufficient income for the continued entertainment of your friends. You will, of course, never see *him* again or have the slightest communication with him. Should he ever come to my house, I warn you that I would treat him as I would a mad dog."

The magnanimity of the man she had so foully wronged, his calmness, his generosity, his consideration for her, instead of softening her heart to penitence, or at least to respect, roused all the evil qualities within her. Had he raved in melodramatic fashion, had he cursed and threatened her instead of ending the interview with the sorrowful admission that the wrecking of their home might have been

partly his fault because he had left her so much alone, she would have felt less bitterness toward him.

All day long she felt the sting of his goodness rankling within her heart. She denied herself to callers, and paced from room to room in the vain attempt to shake off the burden of her thoughts. Was she to remain in his debt perpetually, to be always humiliated by the idea that she was a tolerated inmate of the house, a prisoner on parole? No, a thousand times. There was, there must be some other way—there was *one* way.

She was relieved that her husband did not come home to dinner. She had determined to plead illness, had he done so, for she could not bear the thought of facing him again so soon. She forced herself to eat a hearty meal, for she felt that she might need the sustaining power of food.

After dinner she gathered together her jewels and a few articles of clothing, and put them into a travelling bag. Then she threw on her fine furs —all she could reasonably wear—and left the house. A few moments later she amazed Guy Hamilton by appearing at his apartments near the Attawam Club.

"What on earth, Lucy——" he began.

"We are found out, Guy; Robert knows all!" she cried excitedly, and in a few broken sentences she told him of the discovery of the letter and the life to which her husband had condemned her. The man paled with fear, for he could scarcely believe that the iron-hearted lawyer would fail to wreak vengeance upon himself.

"Good God, Lucy," he muttered, "what's to be done?"

"Done, done—don't you *know* what's to be done? Do you think I can go back to that house like a slave? Do you imagine I shall promise never to see you again? Oh, Guy, can you not see that my love for you has brought me to this, that all I have to hope for now is in you, that I am here to throw myself on your mercy?"

She broke down, and wept piteously, and he, by that peculiar species of social chivalry that could rob a man of his wife without a qualm and yet feel impelled to protect the woman when the crash came, offered to do that of which in his sober senses he never would have dreamed.

"Let us leave this miserable town, Lucy," he said gently, "and never step foot in it again. We will go far away, and begin things anew. Now—to-night—we will start, and to-morrow they may do their worst. Will that satisfy you, my dear?"

Joy and triumph and the delight of undisputed possession shone in her eyes. She seized his hand and kissed it passionately, and he smoothed her hair caressingly and felt that he had never loved her so much as at that moment. It was a fine thing to be trusted, to be relied upon so implicitly, and he vowed that he would give her no cause to repent of her faith in him.

That night the pair left Old Chetford on the midnight train. Their flight was a rich field of discussion for the gossips, who imputed to the lady faults of which even she had never been gulity. But the

dignified attitude of Worth-Courtleigh and his absolute refusal to say a word about the matter to anyone did much to silence the scandal, which finally died a natural death and was resurrected less and less often as time passed on. Even at the club the topic at last became stale, and Claybourne ceased to mourn the loss of his friend, who, he declared sententiously, had fallen a victim to "too much woman."

* * * * *

On the evening of the elopement Ralph Harding wrote a letter of resignation to the Third Congregational Church. In it he told his people that he had seen the great discontent aroused by his sermon of the day before and that he felt that his usefulness as a pastor was over. He regretted the severing of pleasant ties, but was fully persuaded it was for the best. He was determined, he said, to do the work of the Master unfettered by church government and church prejudices. He would deal directly with the people, and answer to himself and his God for the saving of their souls. For this labor he desired a larger field, and he was about to go to some great city there to undertake his mission. He bade his loyal friends a tender farewell; as for the others, those whom he had offended, he hoped that they would think of him at his best.

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTER FIVE YEARS

ON a certain moist afternoon in April, when New York lay steaming under a hot sun, like some formless giant fresh from his ablutions, two men descended the steps of a large brown-stone house on Fifth Avenue. The house was not of the conventional flat and characterless sort, but was fashioned somewhat in the romanesque style, with a low, heavy arch over the entrance and various odd designs around windows and eaves.

The men, though friends, were an oddly assorted pair, "cross-matched," as the more ponderous one had expressed it. This gentleman was Horatio Atherton, well known and heartily feared in Wall Street. Behind the fat and ruddy freshness of his face he concealed the keenness of a vulture in financial scent; his curved nose and little black eyes spoke of rapacity and cruelty in certain contingencies, but his speech never wavered from its mellow suavity. He was dressed with great care, and in the lapel of his correct frock coat he wore his favorite flower, a pink orchid. He was a mining expert of high rank, and his specialty just now was the promoting of new ventures in Colorado.

The dress and manner of the other proclaimed

him an artist. He was tall, slender and dark, and his waving hair was covered by a large black felt hat. His features were beautifully regular, and the perfect oval of his face was well set off by a tiny pointed beard. An impressionist of the impressionists, Philip Dalzell was always striving for a new expression in landscape painting, yearning, as his confreres said, to depict the "light that never was on sea or land." He was making his way rapidly, for in all his weirdness of coloring and sentiment there was more than a trace of genius.

"Well, Atherton," said the artist, as the twain proceeded down the Avenue, "What do you think of the new sensation?"

"She's divine my boy, divine."

"So you, who went to scoff, remained to worship? I thought it would be so."

"She certainly is the most fascinating woman I ever met," avowed the financier earnestly.

"Take care; what if the imperial Miss Van Horn should hear that speech?"

"She would agree with me."

"But like the speech no better for all that, I fancy."

Atherton stopped a moment to light an enormous and very black cigar.

"Who is she?" he asked between puffs.

"Don't you read the newspapers? Besides, I've told you; the Countess Fornay's light is not under a bushel."

"Yes, but——"

"All I know—all that anybody seems to know—is that she's the granddaughter of Adolph Renier, Count Fornay, who died over a year ago in Paris. His son married beneath him, it is said, in America, and his daughter was recognized only when the old Count was so near the end of a tumultuous life that he thought a good deed or two quite essential to a peaceful hereafter. One thing is certain; she was the rage of Washington last winter, and the French embassy officials clicked their heels together every time her name was mentioned. There is no doubt of her social standing—something one can seldom say in these days of mushroom favorites—Ah, how are you?"

The artist nodded cordially to a well-favored man who swung past them with firm and athletic tread.

"Who's your good-looking friend?" asked Atherton.

"He's a clerical chap, Harding by name. You'd never think it by his coat, would you? I met him at the Realists' Club."

"Whew! The Realists'?"

"Queer place for a parson, eh? Well, he is not an ordinary parson. He has cut loose from churches, I believe, so why not the Realists' as well as another? He practices his profession in man to man fashion; says pulpits are screens between God and the people."

"What a bore he must be."

"Not a bit of it, my boy. He's a practical enemy of the devil, and speaking of that gentleman, he

gave 'Satan' Montgomery a tremendous drubbing at balk-line billiards last night at the club."

"Ah, a worldly parson."

"That depends on your definition of the adjective, Atherton. But he does a lot of good in his own way, I'm told. His theory is that cleanliness is not only next to Godliness, but comes first."

Meantime the subject of these pointed remarks continued up the Avenue with mingled emotions, as he found himself nearing the brown-stone house. Only the day before he had received through Worth-Courtleigh this almost brusque message:—

"You say that Mr. Harding is in New York a portion of each month. I shall be there in April, and shall be glad to have him call."

As he thought of Agatha he wondered, first what had happened to her outward seeming, and then how her mind had progressed and altered under the potent spell of Paris. Conjecture was a necessity to him, for after the almost tragic events culminating in her removal from Old Chetford he had felt unable to frame a letter that would suit himself or the occasion. The spectre of Guy Hamilton seemed always at his elbow, chilling his soul with its sneering assumption of the possession of Agatha's heart. He could not give her comfort; he dared not give her what he felt. He had at first hoped that Agatha would take the initiative in the matter of letters, but she had not done so, and the little that he had heard from her had been simple and kindly messages through the mediumship of Mrs. Copeland.

Now and then he had gleaned bits of information

from Worth-Courtleigh, who was more or less in touch with Mrs. Copeland, and had learned that the two had traveled to some extent, but had lived quietly in Paris for the most part, Agatha studying art, music and literature with much thoroughness.

One day the news of the death of Mrs. Copeland had come to the lawyer's office, and thence to Harding in New York. Then he would have written to Agatha, but was uncertain as to her whereabouts. In a week he received a brief note from the girl, saying that after some months of travel she expected to return to America. He had arisen each morning after that with the hope that this day he would hear from her, but nothing further came. And now she was here—he was to see her within a few moments, was to find what time had done for good or ill with a girl who had had such vast possibilities for either.

On his arrival at the big house he was shown to a small reception room of pink and gold by a foreign-looking flunky in green livery, who looked at him curiously when he asked for "Miss Renier." Across the wide hall in the drawing room servants were putting things in order after what had apparently been a reception of some sort. Evidences of wealth were not lacking, but he wondered if Agatha's status in the family were not less desirable than in the old days at Mrs. Copeland's. She was secretary or companion, he presumed, perhaps governess. He knew that the girl could not be the mistress of much money, for it was a matter of common information that the crash in the Attawam

mills and the Oceanic National Bank at Old Chetford, following the defalcation and suicide of "Tom" Harrington, had engulfed most of Mrs. Copeland's property, especially as she had decided, at Agatha's solicitation—so Worth-Courtleigh had told him—to stand behind the bank, in which she was a large stockholder, and pay every dollar of its indebtedness.

The flunkey returned with the announcement:

"Mad'moiselle, ze Countess, vill be down presently."

He felt a little irritation that his card should have gone astray—should have been taken to the mistress of this fine establishment instead of to the—well, servant, although even his democratic spirit recoiled at the word, when all else was obliterated by the sight of Agatha Renier standing in the doorway, and the sound of her cordial voice.

"I am so glad, so glad," she said simply.

For the first time in his life, Ralph Harding could not find words for expression. Not one of his visions of the girl had pictured her like this. Here was a tall, lithe, graceful woman instead of the plump and vivacious girl; a cultured, self-poised, high-bred creature who seemed born to the purple. He would have known her anywhere and yet there was that in her beautiful face that was new and strange —a firmness of the mouth, a depth in the eyes, a latent something more than physical that far removed her from the pupil over whose education he labored with such heartfelt zeal. He gazed at her

long and earnestly without speaking. He was relieved when she rang for the servant.

"I am at home to no one, Pierre," she ordered.

She faced him again, with a trace of her old pretty impetuosity.

"Well, are you not glad to see me?"

"Glad? Surely I am."

"Ah! It was once the American usage to express such sentiments. Perhaps it is changed—*you* have changed," she added suddenly, and was about to say "grown older."

"You have a careworn look. I fear you are working too hard. But you are standing," she said kindly, offering him a chair and sitting down herself.

Harding obeyed mechanically; he was still embarrassed, still under the spell of the new Agatha. What a curious reversal of their positions! In the old days he was the mentor, the *quasi* guardian of her mind and emotions, the one looked up to; now she was the ruler of the situation. At last he realized with vexation that his gaze was still upon her.

"Well, do I stand the scrutiny?" she asked laughingly.

"I—I am afraid I have been very rude."

"Look at me as long as you wish; that, at least, shows some interest. Am I greatly changed?"

"It is more than five years, Agatha—I mean Miss——"

"Why 'Miss?' It is Agatha still, or, if you must be formal, be correct. You heard Pierre, I know."

"Countess? I didn't understand."

She absently turned over and over his card which she had brought down from her boudoir.

"I saw that," she said. "You have not heard of the Countess Fornay, then?"

The light of the truth began to dawn.

"Countess Fornay? You—you are——"

"*Je la suis, Monsieur, a votre service,*" she replied merrily.

"But——"

"It's very simple. You recall the marriage records we found at Mill River?"

He nodded.

"'Alice Stewart to François Renier, son of Adolphe Renier, Count Fornay,' it read. The son died years ago; the father, my grandfather, died three months before dear Mrs. Copeland left me alone in the world."

Her voice choked with emotion, a manifestation that somehow cheered Harding's heart, deeply as he, too, felt the loss of his staunch old friend now so keenly brought home to him.

"I believe," she went on earnestly, "that her death was hastened if not caused, by the trouble at the mills and the bank in Old Chetford. The first news of the crash prostrated her, and with each succeeding tidings of disaster she grew weaker, till her life faded out like the dying of a sunset. It grieved her deeply, too, that her fortune should be diverted from me."

"Ah, but that was your own doing, Agatha, your voluntary sacrifice; I have the facts, you see."

"Don't call it a sacrifice, Mr. Harding; I'm not the woman who makes them. It was only that I couldn't and wouldn't allow innocent victims of a man's rascality to suffer, if I could help it—and I did help it. But the worst blow of all was when five thousand dollars of the little money remaining to Mrs. Copeland was swept away by Guy Hamilton."

"Ah!" exclaimed Harding, almost jumping to his feet at the sound of this name, which came without a tremor from Agatha's lips. He feared that the flood of bitter memories it recalled might upset her, might create a scene in which he would be but a helpless comforter.

But she looked him bravely in the face from her luminous brown eyes, paying no heed to his interruption. She spoke in a hard and emotionless voice.

"Guy Hamilton forged his aunt's name, and she, for her dead sister's sake, kept silent, and let the check be considered genuine. He pleaded that he was on the verge of a great coup in the stock market, that he had only needed the money for an hour to achieve success, when the sudden death of a great financier smashed the market and ruined him. He groveled needlessly, for his aunt would never have prosecuted him."

"It was the act of an ingrate and a scoundrel," exclaimed the minister indignantly. "And they say he is now successful, a lucky operator in the 'Street,' but looked upon as reckless, dangerous, unscrupulous. I hear he is engaged in shady transactions and companies."

"And—that woman?" asked Agatha, with just

a deepening of her color and a tightening of her clasped fingers "the woman he took from her husband."

"Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh? She tired of him as she had tired of Worth-Courtleigh, and ran away with another man. Hamilton was grateful enough to both of them, I dare say. I have heard nothing of her for several years."

"And now," said the youthful countess, with swiftly changing mood, "tell me all about yourself, what you have been doing in New York, what you hope to do, and how the dear old people in Old Chetford—*my* people, you know—are getting along. No, no; no excuses, *I* am mistress here."

He would have ventured a little later to ask Agatha what her plans for the future were, wondering what she intended to do with this splendid and expensive house, but that the chiming of a tiny gold clock on the mantel caused her to rise.

"I hope I do not appear inhospitable, Mr. Harding," she said with a touch of pretty confusion, "but the fact is that I dine at the French consul's to-night, and—well, we women have to dress, you know. I want you to promise to come and see me to-morrow and spend the afternoon. There are many things for us to talk about. Will you?"

He promised with a new feeling of pleasure at his heart, and she saw him to the door herself. There they parted with a warm and friendly clasp of hands that the minister seemed to carry with him as he went his way to the faraway lower parts of the great city.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PENALTY OF FAME

RALPH HARDING awoke early next morning with an undefined satisfaction lying pleasantly upon his half-dreamy consciousness. It slowly took words: "Agatha is here; I saw her yesterday, and shall see her again to-day."

For the moment all vexing questions as to her status in the world, her coming life and her choice of associates faded before the light of the happy fact.

After breakfast and a little correspondence were out of the way he set forth for the Realists' Club where he often went of a morning to see if he might obtain some sort of suggestions for the work of the day. He had joined the organization purely on its reputation for embracing within its membership the most heterogeneous set of men who ever touched elbows under one roof. He expected fresh thoughts, ideas for fresh fields of labor to spring from his association with the radicals he knew were of the Realists' band.

In truth there were all sorts of men in the club—decadent poets, dramatists of half a dozen "new" schools, impossible political reformers, ultra socialists who talked loudly of what ought to be, but never attempted to better what was, "symbolists" in art

and a sprinkling of cynical newspaper men and materialistic brokers.

But, by a quite natural paradox, most of the Realists turned out to be idealists of the pronounced sort, each group worshipping its own special cult with such absolute devotion that any practical work in combination was quite out of the question. So Harding found that, like other clubs, it served as a means to an end: that men without homes might secure imitations, and that men with homes might escape from them on occasion. Still he kept up his membership and extracted stray wheat grains from the general chaff.

The minister's life in New York for the past five years had been one of honest and earnest endeavor to better humanity as he found it. It was not always the very poor he aided; he recognized the Master's "them ye have with you always," and knew that single-handed he could scarcely hope to reduce the number very materially. But he did more than supply a dinner or buy a new coat; he hunted up unfortunates with aspirations for higher things, and these aspirations he helped to expand in manifold ways. He cultivated the acquaintance of business men, and made himself a sort of employment agency with free service; he obtained scholarships in various institutions for those he knew would appreciate them; he rescued sailors from the clutches of landsharks; he taught the law to many a rascally pawnbroker; in short, he did the strange, out-of-the-ordinary things he found nobody else doing, and he

believed that he was filling his niche in the world as effectually as when he was in the pulpit.

Yet he had not been altogether content in the huge Babylon of a city. Its immensity precluded any real affection for it; who could love such a heartless giant that rushed unceasingly about its business with no care for suffering or for sin?

His regular trips to Old Chetford had been the bright parts of his existence; although he may not have recognized it, his visits to the first children of his sympathy, the Coffee House and the hospital, had really been more necessary to his own well-being than to those now flourishing institutions.

The quarters of the Realists' Club, to which Harding made his way with his customary swinging gait, were as odd as its members. They completely filled the top story of a tall office building on Madison Avenue and the view from the many windows was superb. Being on one floor the effect was like that of an immense suite of rooms whose owner had gone mad on the subject of varied decorations. The artists had a room specially devoted to their fraternity, the musicians another, while the authors, saints and sinners alike, rejoiced in a great apartment that contained a dozen private desks. It was a sight for the gods when these literary shrines were all occupied by wooers of the Muses who performed their devotions by no means in silence.

The comfortable and well-stocked reading room was the favorite resort of the club gossips, but this morning it was deserted when Harding reached the

club. He took up a morning paper and turned to the "Situations Wanted" column, as he was accustomed to do each day that he might perchance find there the cry of some poor fellow whom he could help. Before long Dalzell, the artist, strolled in.

"Good morning, Harding," he said pleasantly, "saw you going to the Countess Fornay's yesterday afternoon, didn't I? Do you know her?"

"Yes."

"Lucky fellow. She has the holy trinity of beauty, style and brains and the greatest of these is—well, first you think it is one, then you are convinced it's another, and at last you swear it's the third. Of course you've read her book."

"No," replied the minister greatly surprised, "I didn't know—"

"Wait a minute. Here's a copy right on the table. Behold," and he thrust it with a triumphant air into Harding's hands. The latter turned to the title-page and read:

"Men and Women: Their Manners and Their Meannesses. Twelve Essays by Miss Petticoats."

The well remembered name was like a blow in the face to Harding. With all its sacred associations to be flaunted here under the title of a sensational book! How could Agatha have done such a thing? He read on:

"Translated from the French Edition as Reprinted from *Le Revue de Deux Mondes*, by the Author."

"Clever pseudonym, eh?" said the enthusiastic artist. "Clever book, too, and bitter as wormwood.

Handles society shams without gloves. Everybody is talking about it, and wondering where she got her insight. By Jove, she's the greatest woman New York has seen for years."

"Who is now receiving the endorsement of your impressionistic ardor, Dalzell?" said a coldly suave voice behind Harding.

"Hallo, Atherton, that you? What brings you here so early in the morning?"

"Business."

"Little need of asking."

"I answered your question, but you—"

"Was there need to answer yours? Of whom could I be talking except the Countess Fornay? Pardon me, Mr. Harding; I think you don't know my friend Atherton."

"Delighted, I'm sure," murmured the financier, while Harding, as he shook the outstretched hand perfunctorily, felt an instinctive dislike for the craftily sensual face that but half-concealed a sneer in every smile. He wondered what this man and the frank and honorable Dalzell could have in common. And that he should know Agatha—that was a profanation that made his blood grow hot. Nor was it cooled by the calm tones of the newcomer as he went on:—

"The Countess is certainly worthy of your pæans, Philip. She is ravishing."

From the lips of the banker the compliment was an insult, and Harding writhed under it as a dog under a lash. He would have burst forth into some sort of remonstrance, but that he knew he would

make himself ridiculous and Agatha worse than that. He walked deliberately away from the two and, picking up a magazine, sat down and tried to read. But he could not shut out their conversation; he might have gone to another room, but he was held by a strange fascination.

"She's promised to give me a sitting," exclaimed Dalzell, with a fine air of triumph.

"Not a portrait, I hope," said the blandly sarcastic voice of Atherton.

"Why not, pray?"

"She might not like being mistaken for an impressionist cow."

A new group of loungers, seeing Dalzell and Atherton, came into the room. It was always taken for granted that there would be something worth repeating when these two wits clashed weapons.

"She has promised to sit for an allegorical picture," declared the artist serenely.

"Then she can't want notoriety, Dalzell, for she'll be swallowed up in your theories."

"I shall paint her as 'The Modern Circe,' but instead of swine as the objects of her fascination there will be men—men of rotundity, both of person and money-bags. Your portrait, Atherton, will be well in the foreground."

A burst of appreciative laughter greeted this thrust.

"There's one comfort," retorted the ruddy banker, "if you paint it, I shall never be recognized."

Then a shout at the artist's expense, and a tentative expression of the opinion that it might not be too early in the day for gentlemen to take a drink.

"Well, anyway," declared Dalzell, "you are at her feet already, though you've seen her but once."

"Nonsense, my boy, it's only a matter of business investments."

This entertaining dialogue was ended by the sudden appearance of a fair-haired, boyish fellow with a fresh complexion and a wholesome atmosphere about him, who dashed up to the group waving a newspaper.

"Here, you fellows," he exclaimed, "have you seen the *Morning Crier?* Here's a whole page about the Countess." And he held aloft a sheet half covered over with illustrations and shrieking headlines. Even from his distance Harding could see the unmistakable likeness of Agatha Renier. The crass baldness of the thing made him shudder.

"Read it to us," cried several of the company.

Nothing loth, the youth began the glowing article. With great satisfaction he rolled forth such phrases as "Nobles at her feet abroad," "Welcomed by the most select literary circles," "Talk of adding her name to the roll of the Immortals," "Another book in preparation."

Inevitably Agatha's personal life then received the attention of the writer's vivid imagination. Upon the one fact that she was the granddaughter of Count Fornay was builded a most marvellous structure of falsehood and fancy. After stating that she

had received from her noble ancestor a fortune estimated at several million francs, the article proceeded:

"That the advent of this beautiful, titled and talented woman has set Gotham agog with admiration is not surprising when it is known that for several years she was the open rival of the Grand Duchess of Holstein for the affections of her hitherto devoted and scandal-free spouse. She—"

"Let me have that paper, will you, Armstrong?"

Harding had jumped to his feet, impelled by an overpowering sense of anger and outraged justice. He broke into the group and faced the boy with as much calmness as he could command for service.

"Why, certainly, Mr. Harding, if you wish it," replied the young fellow in some astonishment.

The minister crushed the paper in his hands contemptuously, tore it backwards and forwards many times and then slowly let the pieces fall upon the floor.

"Gentlemen," he said—and his fine voice had never been more impressive—"that story of the Countess Fornay is a tissue of extravagant falsehoods which are an insult to a good woman and a disgrace to the newspaper that published them."

The company was undoubtedly interested. Here was a parson who was worth while; he rushed to the defence of the wonderful Countess Fornay, and he talked as if he were sure of his ground. Others joined the group, and all stood around Harding eager for his next words.

"I knew the Countess Fornay," he went on,

" when she was—well, a girl. She has beauty, as you all know. She has also good blood and good brains, and her heart is pure, her character such as you desire for your sisters. She is a woman entitled to the respect and protection of every decent man. Would you, Armstrong, like to have your sister or your future wife the subject of the public gossip of club loungers?"

" No, no, Mr. Harding, I would not," returned the boy with great earnestness. " I am really sorry; it was thoughtless of me," and he shook the minister warmly by the hand, making a sincere friend by his honest avowal.

" H'm," thought Atherton, as he left for the financial district and his never ending scheming, " pretty warm defence on the part of our clerical friend. How sits the wind in that quarter, I wonder? I shall make it my business to find out."

After the crowd separated, Harding read a little more, this time in peace, and then bethought himself of his engagement with Agatha. His watch told him that by going afoot he would reach her house at about the appointed time.

" How will it all end?" was the question that kept time to his step as he walked rapidly uptown.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EMBERS OF HATE

THE green-clad servant who took the minister's card had evidently received his instructions, for he did not carry it upstairs, but threw it into a little silver tray on the hall table, remarking:—

"Mad'moiselle La Countess gave ordaires you vere to be shown zis vay."

Harding followed the flunkey toward the stairs, when the sight of a familiar figure made him rub his eyes. No, there was no mistake about it; it was the well-knit frame of James Anderson, who had disappeared from Old Chetford shortly after the departure of Agatha and Mrs. Copeland. The ex-coachman's square-cut face was illumined by a broad smile as he saw his old-time antagonist with the stuffed mittens. He approached and bowed respectfully.

"I thought I couldn't be mistaken, James," said the minister, as he extended his hand cordially, "how are you?"

"Very well, sir, thank ye kindly. I hopes you are the same."

"As usual, Anderson, and glad to see you again."

Oblivious to the disdain which this exhibition of

courtesy from a visitor to a servant had aroused in the breast of the Gallic gentleman, Harding followed his leader up one flight to a dainty morning room which was just now in a state of delightful confusion occasioned by the presence of several gaily adorned pasteboard boxes and fluffy heaps of silks, muslins, tulles and other fabrics beloved by femininity. A large, yellow-haired woman in street costume was just leaving the apartment.

Agatha's greeting was kind in a volatile sort of way, but her manner, Harding thought, was more artificial than he liked to see.

"You will pardon this confusion, I know, Mr. Harding," she rattled on, "but Madame Lafarge has been showing me the superior points of the new gowns her firm has just completed for me. Would you like to view the feminine 'wanities'?"

He nodded as a matter of courtesy, and she, picking up one creation after another, shook each out gaily and held it against her body that the effect might be noted. Through it all she chatted with a volubility that somehow seemed not quite on the right key to Harding's sensitive ear. It was not that she took delight in the pretty dresses, for so did he, so far as his masculine mind would permit; it was the apparent shallowness of the new Agatha that troubled him. Finally he said, with a touch of sternness:—

"Not much like the old life, Agatha; but I see you have a bit of it in the house."

She looked up from the critical inspection of a ruffle, with inquiry in her eyes.

"I mean James Anderson."

"Oh, yes; Mrs. Copeland sent for him to come to Paris on the steamer next after ours. He was an invaluable body-guard, even if he did sometimes get into trouble through his truly British determination not to learn French." And she laughed heartily.

"I was glad to see him; it was like a breath of the old days.—Do you ever miss them, Agatha?"

"Miss them?"

There was a suggestion of tears in the voice, a sudden shifting from gaiety to deep yearning.

"Do you prefer this—this style of life?"

"Prefer it!" she echoed again, with a bitterness of accent that stung him to the very core.

"Then why—?"

"You ask why?" she cried, rising impetuously. "Have you forgotten what happened five years ago? Have you forgotten that the kindliest, noblest woman in Old Chetford was driven from her home because she had befriended a young girl and was true to her in the hour of calumny? Have you forgotten that that girl's grandfather was sent to his death by a vile letter penned by a vile man, who, under the guise of friendship and the respectability lent him by the countenance of his upright aunt, insulted and incited others to insult a girl whose only fault was that she accepted his counterfeit of decency as genuine? Have you forgotten those things, I say?"

"No, Agatha, I have not forgotten," he replied sadly.

"Perhaps you may not have forgotten, too, how

the memory of that girl's mother was reviled in the streets; yes, even in the church; how the false accusers of her daughter smiled knowingly, and infamously suggested that the daughter of such a woman could not be other than they said she was. I have not forgotten. For five years I have thought and thought of the cruelty of it all. For five years I have schemed and planned that I might fit myself to exact the measure of vengeance that such crimes demand. To-day I stand on the threshold of the temple of justice in which I shall be judge and executioner. I will humble these people who have outraged the dead and maligned the living. I care little for myself, but the memory of the dead will not suffer me to forget or overlook their wrongs. I have position and the influence of friends. Fate has been kind to me. My birthright came to me almost by accident. Years ago I swore that Old Chetford should one day kneel to me, and that I would turn away in disdain. I tell you, Ralph Harding, that day is near at hand!"

As the fires of this outburst burned themselves away, leaving only the ashes of their wrath, the girl sank to her knees before a great stuffed chair and buried her face in her hands. Then came the needful flood of tears. The minister watched her sob-shaken figure for a minute or two and then gently raised her with quieting words. He was greatly perturbed; here was a soul in distress, such as he had long since vowed to help. But how, in such an instance?

To comfort this beautiful woman whom he held

so dear was a vastly different thing from solacing his "people" in trouble. He who knew all, who knew even more than Agatha herself, of the injustice of society's attitude toward her, could scarcely blame her for bitterness against the powers that were. Yet he feared for the corroding force of long-cherished desire for revenge upon the soul of this unhappy girl.

He would have given five years of his life for the eloquence that should show her the truth, but he knew her nature well enough, even in its changed form, to be sure that open opposition and direct argument would but add fresh fuel to the flames.

He went to the window for a moment, and looked out upon the tide of traffic flowing up and down with ceaseless gaiety under the spring sun. Not far away, where the delicate twin spires of the cathedral pierced the blue, he saw in the street a long line of carriages drawn up against the curb. A bright canopy was stretched across the sidewalk, evidently to be the first avenue into the world of some newly-made bride.

With a sigh he turned from the scene, to meet a gaze of intensity from Agatha which he could not fathom. He crushed down all other thoughts and began to put some practical questions to the girl.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked, trying to speak calmly.

"I shall go to Old Chetford in June. The Copeland house—it is mine now—is being renovated, and I shall see to it that those who are my guests while I am there will prove to calumniators that in mere position they are not worthy to tie my shoe."

"And your money, Agatha? You have enough to enable you to live as I find you here?"

"For the present, yes. The Count left me an estate of three hundred thousand francs; of this I have thirty-five thousand dollars left. I hate the money, and would not touch it, save for this one purpose. If I need more, I can make it. Indeed, I have already proved this to my own satisfaction here in New York."

Harding wondered how, but did not seek to investigate. Instead he ventured another inquiry.

"You spoke of a letter to your grandfather. May I know about it?"

"Is it possible you do not know? Yet, why should you?"

She told the story, and he, too, felt much of her passionate indignation. But he saw that she had not read the authorship of the letter aright, and his sense of fairness would not allow him to keep silent, even for such a man as Guy Hamilton. Knowing the cloak episode, he was morally certain that the miserable wife of his lawyer-friend had penned the words that sent Captain Stewart to his grave. So, in a general way, he defended Guy as a possible victim of unwarranted suspicions, and urged that the meanest creature was entitled to justice.

He could not help wondering if Agatha had ever heard of the episode at the Attawam Club on that tumultuous night when James Anderson became her champion by proxy. In her present condition, however, he would not have dared interrogate her.

The name of Guy Hamilton, coming from his lips

and uttered in tones of attempted charity, was like flame to flax in the girl's already surcharged heart. An intensity of hatred burned in her eyes, and her face was hardened into something that troubled the minister deeply.

"Justice to him!" she said with curling lip. "A horse-whip or a hempen noose would be justice, perhaps. But I do not want that kind of justice. He must be reached, as I shall reach him, through his selfish impulses. His pride, his self-esteem, must be abased. I shall find a way. As for that woman—the woman who, while she was trying to disgrace me was paving the road to her own shame—she, too, shall suffer through me. How I do not know, but vengeance will come. Right, fate, God, everything is on my side.—No, I know what you would say," she added quickly, as Harding made a deprecatory gesture and would have spoken, "but it would be useless. You are a true friend and a noble man, but you have not suffered as I have, and you cannot realize the truth. You must let me work out my own salvation in my own way."

For a long time after this there was silence between them, she dreaming of the day of her triumph, of which she was as sure as that she should wake on the morrow, and he again turning the pages of the past until he came to that scene of the whalers' farewell supper to their "Aggy." How often had he recalled that warning phrase of his, tinged with a darker hue of fate than he dreamed at the time. This harking back to the "Harpoon" suggested something that might break the tension of their present attitude; he would try it.

"I saw Hank Donelson the last time I was in Old Chetford, Agatha, and he spoke of you, as he always does."

In an instant the clouds rolled away from the girl's mind, and she saw only the brightness of the days far back of her first great trouble. She clapped her hands gaily, and smiled as charmingly as of old.

"And Captain Sykes and Artemas—did you see them, too, dear old barnacles that they are!"

"Yes, both of them; hale and hearty, too, they were, and still talking of their 'little craft that ain't been spoken for a thunderin' while an' is a good deal overdue.'"

"The salt old tarry angels! And is Artemas as much of a roistering blade as ever, and is Captain Sykes tired of telling the 'Mozambique' yarn yet?"

"They're the same to a dot, Agatha." Then suddenly: "How would you like to see them?"

"See them?"

"Yes; I've been thinking of inviting them to New York for a day or two as my guests. If I do that, would you like to have me bring them up here?"

"Why of *course,* Mr. Harding," cried she delightedly, "and you are so good to have thought of it. You know I cannot go to Old Chetford—yet. Get them over as soon as ever you can."

Harding agreed to expedite matters, and went down town with a far brighter hope for Agatha than he had yet felt. The last few moments of their interview had told him that she still had a heart.

That night a letter was sent to Old Chetford on a mission that was destined to bring much joy to the three musketeers of Tuckerman's Wharf.

CHAPTER XXX

A RIFT IN THE CLOUDS

FOR several days Agatha was to Harding a flitting and a fleeting vision. He had called once or twice, but found that her time was so fully claimed by the exactions of social duties as to give little opportunity for friendly chats. Receptions to which she was invited and which she herself gave, suppers, theatre-parties, musicales and the dozens of other frivolities with which the semi-Bohemian set in New York seeks to amuse itself, absolutely filled her life almost to the exclusion of personal comfort.

"I am sure she doesn't really care for this sort of thing," mused the minister over a pipe in his plain little bedroom, "it isn't in her nature to. All these fripperies, I can see, are being used simply as a means to an end. On the whole, I rather wish the life she is leading interested her a little more. It would be better for her nature than that dull hunger for vengeance that's gnawing at her soul."

He thought of trying to enlist her in his work among "distressed souls," but abandoned the idea as impracticable for the present. He could do nothing now but wait and hope.

A letter from Captain Sykes, flavored with the

breath of the ocean, came to him in due time accepting gladly the invitation to visit New York. In it some nautical phrase suggested his own relations with Agatha—it was curious how most things of power or picturesqueness did suggest her. He seemed to be the keeper of a lighthouse near a reef. Agatha's safety was threatened on a dark and tempestuous night, and he, imprisoned, could only guard and trim the light until wind and wave should drive their precious burden nearer to him. But—would she see the beacon tended by his love and care and be guided by it into the safe channel? It was a question that almost stunned him.

He was greatly delighted when James Anderson hunted him up at his lodgings one evening to talk over old times in the smoke of good tobacco. He sincerely admired that sturdy ex-prize-fighter for a devotion to Agatha which was like the honest love of a noble dog for its mistress, and he thought more of him than ever when James, in hesitating fashion, made evident that the girl's manner of living and bitterness of spirit had impressed him profoundly.

As a result of this consultation it was agreed that James, who was now Agatha's courier and agent in many things, should keep a sharp watch upon affairs in the big house, and report at once to Harding if any untoward events should occur.

"That is a bit like playing the spy," thought the minister after James had gone, "but if ever the end justified the means, this is the case."

The next evening, as a dainty card on his study table told him, Agatha was to give an "At Home,

with Music." Although this sort of thing had long been foreign to Harding's mode of life, he determined to go. He argued that he might be able to formulate some plan to help her by seeing the sort of people with whom she was surrounded; but the fact was that even in the crowd that was certain to be in attendance upon a reigning favorite he would obtain pleasure from her mere presence.

When he reached the Fifth Avenue house on the following night it was aflame with many window lights, and a long line of carriages was crawling along the curb, each stopping for a moment to discharge its butterfly occupants. The music of a string band floated vaguely out upon the night air, its individuality blurred by the ceaseless chatter of many tongues. James Anderson stood at the steps, dignified and unperturbed, but the French servants within the hall were running about and gesticulating with great apparent excitement in their attempts to settle the guests.

The great double drawing-room of crimson and silver tones, and just now beautifully decorated with choice flowers, was filling rapidly, and Harding joined the throng unobserved by anyone he knew. He determined to hold aloof for a time and note the conditions by which Agatha was environed.

Just at present the girl was gaily chatting in French with M. Sayer, a famous violinist whom she had met in Paris. He was a tall, ponderous man with a smooth face and straight black hair that fell over his ears in somewhat saintly fashion. There was nothing saintly about the real individual, how-

ever, for the story of his amours, one of which had been with a world-renowned prima-donna, would have filled a volume. Harding knew the artist's reputation, and a chill struck to his heart as he saw the leer the player cast upon Agatha's beautiful shoulders and neck. He himself had never seen her in evening dress before, and to have this almost holy first impression marred by the satyr-genius was intolerable.

Nor were some of the others who fluttered about the radiant young woman any more reassuring. He saw the sensual-faced Atherton greeted like an old friend by the girl; he saw Theodore Edlington, one of the Realists' nastiest poets of decadence, engage her in conversation; he saw "Satan" Montgomery, with most horrible of reputations, touch that white and shapely hand. At last came Harry Armstrong, fresh, honest and admiring, and Harding was thankful for the little leaven that his presence afforded.

The women were, of course, irreproachable. Agatha was now wise enough to know that whatever the masculine portion of her devotees might lack in the virtues, the feminine contingent must counterbalance in order that her own status might be secure.

She had invited several leaders in consular circles, a woman novelist or two, an actress of excellent social standing, some music patrons and a sprinkling of others well known as bohemians of position. It was a bright and entertaining crowd, and the event was at once a success. M. Sayer's playing was delightful as ever; his air of rapt spirituality as fascinating and as inscrutable.

As the evening wore away, the minister, who had been very cordially received by Agatha and made to feel somehow like a guest of honor, could not fail to notice the avidity with which the sleek Atherton hung upon the girl's words and the ill-concealed grossness of the attentions he paid her. Others, too, were impressed, as he learned when young Armstrong approached him with boyish wrath upon his fair face.

"Isn't it disgraceful, the way Atherton looks at the Countess?" he exclaimed impetuously. "He hasn't a bit of respect for any woman, that fellow. I wish I were her brother for a few minutes; I'd—I'd—"

Harding had no real fear for Agatha; he felt indignation, however, that so much moral leprosy should be almost in touch with her. Yet he smiled, too, as he saw her surrounded like a queen by the crowd of sycophants, thinking of Philip Dalzell's intention of painting her as a Circe, with men instead of swine as her victims. He was sure that this gathering did not appeal to her as made up of individuals; they were a collective means to an end, like the whole life she was now leading. Yet again this Atherton—Did not Agatha's pronounced favor toward him raise him from the level of being simply a part of the whole? He was much relieved when Dalzell sauntered up to the window, where he was standing in semi-retirement, and observed:

"Atherton's at it again, talking shop now to the fair Countess, and, strange to say, she appears to

know as much about stocks as he does." And he yawned and wandered away.

Atherton had interested Agatha very deeply. He was a brilliant talker where finance was concerned, and he spread before her mind pictures of the "market" that were vivid and seductive. Here they met on common ground, ground upon which she hoped to erect the fabric of her ambition. He told her in particular of a company in which he was interested and which would repay her investigation, if she cared to place her money to good advantage. Her instinct told her that he was sincere, that he was fascinated by her and would put wealth in her way so long as he was favored.

"Some of the best operators on the 'street' are in it," he had declared, "and its president is that luckiest of plungers, Guy Hamilton. You've heard of him, perhaps."

Agatha started at the name, and breathed heavily for a moment. Her hand sought her heart; her face was tense and drawn. To think that that despised name should come forth at such a time and in such a place! Atherton must certainly have noticed her agitation, for he was as keen as a ferret, but that the noise of a sudden disturbance in the hall attracted his attention in common with that of all the guests.

The protesting tones of a servant uttered in very rapid broken English rose above the general hum of conversation, followed by a high-pitched, squeaky voice in reply.

"Huh! I tell ye we *will* go in, consarn ye. Parson

Hardin's in thar, an' it's him we come ter see. An' mebbe our Aggy's thar too. Leastwise, we're a-goin' ter find out, so avast thar, ye land lubber."

In another instant there appeared in the broad doorway the strangest trio that ever set foot in a New York drawing-room. The tiny figure of Hank Donelson in the centre, was flanked on one side by the big and ruddy Captain Sykes and on the other by the weazened Artemas. There they stood shoulder to shoulder, like the three guardsmen of deathless fame, but with all their courage of a moment ago utterly wiped out by the brilliancy of the scene before them. Then, too, they felt that their apparel, which they had thought so elegant and modish when they left Old Chetford, was after all scarcely adapted to evening wear. Even the Captain's long frock coat, the pride of them all, into which he had managed to stow his capacious chest with tremendous effort, now seemed commonplace; Hank began to despise his cherished tight lavender trousers and Artemas had dark suspicions of the immense scarlet necktie he had purchased especially for the trip. A well-bred titter added to their pitiable confusion. They were helpless, speechless and were just about to turn and flee precipitately when—

A tall, beautiful vision in moss-rose satin sprang from somewhere within the gay throng and ran across the room to greet them. The vision wrung each one's hands warmly and kissed each in the simple fashion of childhood. It was Agatha, yes, their dear " Aggy " grown so handsome and so grand that she overawed them, yet not too grand to remember

"Yet not too grand to remember old friends."

old friends and the days when she was their pet and their pride. The warm-hearted little Hank could have wept with delight, but he realized that dignified composure was due this splendid young woman, and he whispered to his companions that they must "keep sheets taut and head up into the wind like a frigate."

Agatha turned with a little apology for the interruption and introduced the three mariners to the company.

"They are very dear old friends of my childhood," she added simply, "and comrades of my dead grandfather."

All this was accepted by Agatha's guests as a delightful manifestation of the eccentricity of genius; give a woman a title, and society will applaud if she chooses to turn handsprings in public. So they made much of the tars as interesting specimens from another world, and before the evening had far spent itself Dalzell had exacted a half-promise from Artemas that he would give him a sitting for a study to be called "The Ancient Mariner."

When the people dispersed, Atherton was among the last to leave, loth to depart from this woman who had so impressed him. After Agatha had bidden him good-night, she added:

"I will call at your office to-morrow, Mr. Atherton, and we can resume our very interesting discussion."

As the financier descended the steps he chuckled and rubbed his hands together with a lingering, caressing motion, characteristic of him when he

thought that his plans were maturing satisfactorily. His overweening vanity led him to imagine that Agatha's interest in him was special and personal, and he determined to foster this by every means in his power, good or ill—it mattered very little.

If he had reentered the house, his smile of self-congratulation might have turned to a grimace of chagrin, for, forgetful of him and even of the Guy Hamilton whose ghost he had raised, Agatha Renier, Countess Fornay, was sitting cross-legged on the floor in her satin gown, and before her, charmed, amazed and a bit bewildered, were the three old sailors of Tuckerman's Wharf.

CHAPTER XXXI

FOR HIGH STAKES

THE visitors from old Chetford were installed for the night in the most luxurious quarters they had ever known. To Harding's proposal to take the tars down town and provide lodgings for them near his own chambers Agatha turned a deaf ear. She would not hear of the old fellows' departure, especially as spare rooms were plentiful in the big house. So Hank, Artemas and Captain Sykes each got as beautiful a bedroom as any society queen. What to do with such magnificence they scarcely knew, but a bed, at least, needs no introduction to tired human beings, and at last they were settled for the night.

At breakfast next morning they were as happy as larks, although Artemas did mildly repine at his failure to sleep.

"Yer see, Miss Aggy," he observed, "it's the fust time in nigh on ter forty years, when I came ter York afore, that I've spent a night out'n the ol' hammock. Yer bed was terrible purty an' powerful soft, but thet thar sinkin' down whenever ye moved was more'n I could stand. So I jest pulled the mattress off'n thet thar wire contraption and put it on

the floor. Ye won't mind, will ye, Aggy?" he queried, in some trepidation.

"No, indeed, Artemas," she replied, laughing gaily. "To-night you shall have the spring removed and slats put in, if you like."

"Thankee; thankee kindly," said the grateful old man.

The meal was not achieved without sundry perturbations of spirit on the part of the whalers. Gentlemen at heart, they feared that their ignorance of the amenities of a refined table might shame Agatha in the eyes of her servants. Wonderful men, those servants! Such lordly dignity as encompassed the butler, in particular, had never been seen before. Hank watched him closely, wondering what stroke of fate had brought such an evident scion of a noble family into service. As the man brought him his coffee with the suavity and pomp of a diplomatic dean, his eyes nearly popped out of his head, and the food he was carrying to his mouth stopped halfway. Sykes noted Agatha's movements and imitated all that she did, while Artemas, more independent than either of his friends, fed himself in his own way serenely, and made a breakfast that warmed the cockles of his heart.

"Suthin' like ol' times, eh?" asked Captain Sykes jovially, as they ate and chatted and were very happy. Then, seeing the shadow that passed over his hostess' face, he added gently: "'ceptin'—one."

"Yes, dear old grandfather," murmured the girl with glistening eyes. "And the 'Harpoon'—has she—has she been broken up?"

No answer came from a single tar. Artemas looked at Sykes, Sykes looked at him, and both looked at Hank Donelson. Hank looked at the French clock on the mantel with a gaze of intense concentration.

"Ye heern what Miss Aggy said," observed the captain mildly.

"Yes, Hank, is she broke up?" piped Artemas.

The little tar started as from a deep revery.

"Oh, no; she ain't broke up—yet," he replied, and his ruddy face gradually worked itself into the semblance of a smile.

"I'm glad of that," said the girl simply. Whereat all three of the old sea-fossils chuckled immoderately. Agatha wondered a little as to what amused her guests so much, but knowing them to be "odd fish," nothing they could do appeared strange to her.

Breakfast over, the trio retired to the library at Agatha's express command for a pull at their pipes. From that room came, from time to time, the sound of Hank's voice addressing something in a pleading tone to Artemas. Then Sykes's deep bass joined in, and finally all three seemed to be talking at once and rather excitedly. Agatha ventured in to ask what the matter was.

"Why, yer see, Miss Aggy," explained the captain, "the boy, here, is pesterin' Artemas ter take him down ter the Bow'ry ter see the sights. Artemas was here onct afore an' knows the ropes. But we don't know as how the young feller ought ter be took ter such a place."

"Oh, I think it entirely safe," replied Agatha, as seriously as she was able. "With two such guardians as you, Hank will not be corrupted, I am sure."

Thus encouraged, they sallied forth under the pilotage of Slickersley, who, forty years before, had actually been in the classic street that Hank desired to tread, and felt intensely proud of his superior knowledge.

Soon after their departure Agatha was driven by James Anderson to Wall Street, and reached that dark cañon of finance as its rushing flood of business was at its height.

The offices of Atherton were high up in an immense building near the Stock Exchange, and were typical of that luxury with which the kings of gaming delight to surround themselves. Carpets of the richest velvet hushed the hurrying footfalls of employés and "customers;" fine paintings gave relief to eyes wearied by the ceaseless procession of figures on the "tape;" beautiful and elaborately appointed desks were at the service of speculators, and there was a handsome, glass-enclosed room for women "clients," of whom Atherton had a large number. Here Agatha sat for a moment until the broker should appear; she knew he would not delay.

A "ticker" was spewing forth its endless strip of narrow paper, hammering upon it the fateful figures which so many thousands of eyes, bright with hope, or "dim with unshed tear," were watching at that very moment as far as Wall Street was a power. Agatha lifted the coil from its tall wicker basket

and passed it quickly through her fingers, noting the selling prices of certain stocks. Evidently the gods of chance were well inclined, for she smiled at what she saw, and reached for one of the little order blanks on a shelf near by. She was about to write something under the boldly printed "SELL" on the slip, when Atherton entered.

The strong man of finance was most fastidiously dressed and freshly groomed; even his daily orchid had been chosen with lingering care. He greeted his beautiful visitor with so deferential a manner that even the clerks took notice, especially as one of them recognized the Countess from her newspaper portrait. The whisper ran around the room, even to the other feminine "clients," and Agatha was at once the object of keen scrutiny, for which she cared not at all. The days of the blush at searching glances were long since passed.

"Ah, my dear Countess, I am indeed charmed to see you. I trust you are as well as you look this morning," was Atherton's greeting, to which Agatha replied in a few direct words and with no notice whatever of the broadly implied compliment.

She told the delighted financier that she had been much interested in his conversation of the evening before; that she had often wished to learn something of stock transactions from a master of the subject. She even confessed to having taken a few little "flyers" since her arrival in New York, which had resulted rather well. To the blasé man of the world she seemed almost like a pretty child rejoicing over a new toy.

"The stock market is so much more exciting than Monte Carlo," she exclaimed with enthusiasm. "There you see all the cards, and poof! it's all over in a moment; you're happy or wretched, and that's an end to it."

"But at Monte Carlo they play fair. Here in Wall Street the cards are marked," he said significantly, leaning toward her with a look in his beady eyes that aroused her distrust and told her that if she were to use him as a pawn in her match with fate she must make her moves skillfully, "but I can teach you to play the game in safety."

She wondered what his price for the instruction might be—she knew that all men of his stamp had a price. But she dismissed the thought as having no immediate bearing on her visit, and turned again to the matter in hand.

"I thank you, Mr. Atherton. But you were talking of mining stocks last night, were you not? What is there in particular that you can recommend?"

"There are several, Countess," he replied, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "but the best of them all, the king-pin in the money making line, is, in my opinion, the stock of the 'United Mines Syndicate'."

"I do not know it."

"It has only been listed a few days. As a matter of fact, it is not a mining company at all, but an amalgamation made up to control the handling of a number of concerns whose stocks are now active,

such as 'Huronide,' 'Gotham and Michigan,' 'Don Quixote,' 'Norumbega' and others of that sort."

"But not one of those stocks is paying a dividend now, and there are assessments on two of them," said Agatha quietly.

The broker flushed deeply, and into his little eyes there came a look of greater respect for his caller's calibre.

"My dear young lady, it is not a question of getting dividend-payers, or even of escaping assessments. The simple facts are that we have consolidated those stocks under one management; that many of the stockholders in the smaller companies have handed in their shares for exchange; that there are, however, a great many transactions still unclosed——"

"A large 'short' interest, you mean?"

He looked at her with ever growing wonderment. "Yes, a large 'short' interest in the various stocks. For some time we have been buying in all these companies through a varied assortment of brokers to avert suspicion, and to-day we have practically a 'corner' in every one of them. When we get ready to move we shall——"

"'Squeeze' them?"

"Ah, Countess, you are superb! We shall do more—we shall wring them by the neck until there is not a drop of gold left in their wretched bodies. How? Very simple. When the 'shorts' find that they are struggling against a 'corner' of the most unrelenting sort, we shall announce that shares of

the 'United Mines Syndicate' will be accepted for delivery in place of Norumbega, Huronide or whatever the stock may be. Then you will see a rush for 'United Mines' such as Wall Street rarely knows, and we who hold it will profit by hundreds of thousands of dollars. I hold success in my very hand; I cannot fail," he said solemnly.

"About Mr. Hamilton—you said that was the name of the president, I believe?"

"To tell you the truth," he replied cautiously, although his infatuation was now complete, "Hamilton has not played square with me in this deal, I'm afraid. At any rate, he is carrying a great load just now, and with proper manipulation, he might be forced out of the 'United,'"

"Beaten at his own game!" said Agatha, her lips tightening.

"Exactly."

They talked a little more as to the profits that would arise from the *coup,* and then Agatha rose to go.

"Well, the prospect is alluring," she said, "perhaps I may invest a little money in the plan."

At that moment she glanced through the glass partition and noted a tall, elegantly dressed man talking with one of the clerks. There was something so familiar in his figure and bearing that she was scarcely surprised when he turned and she saw that it was Guy Hamilton. She crushed down a great impulse to cry out; she commanded herself to compose her face, that the broker standing so

close to her should not read the secret of her hate. She turned to him with an admirable counterfeit of nonchalance.

"I really must be going," she said. "That mining stock you speak of—how high are the stakes?"

"I think twenty-five thousand would be needed if you wish for large returns."

"So little? Well, you may depend upon me."

As Atherton returned from the escorting of his fascinating visitor to her carriage, his joy was profound. For her money he cared little; it was the prospect of at least friendly relations with her during the progress of the *coup*, the assured propinquity to a beautiful woman, that intoxicated his materialistic soul. Perhaps he might even win her love!

Agatha went away feeling that she had embarked on a dangerous voyage, in the course of which she would need her utmost cleverness and self-possession. More money than she now had would also be demanded, but this she had good reason to believe she could obtain; her ventures in the market thus far had been very successful, and she followed the maxims of Mrs. Copeland in every move she made.

Just how she should proceed against Guy Hamilton she did not know, but, since the mention of his name the evening before, her determination that in some way he should feel the blight of her revenge had been intensified to the proportions of mania. Cost what it might in money or temporary self-abasement, she would bring him to the dust in which he had once prostrated her.

She lunched at Delmonico's, and was then driven back to Twenty-third Street to do some shopping. There, bethinking herself of her three old friends, she dismissed James with the injunction to go home and see if they had returned, if they had not, he was to sally forth to the lower city and get upon their trail forthwith.

CHAPTER XXXII

A SIGNAL OF DISTRESS

THE three sailors, after leaving the sheltering walls of Agatha's house, hailed one of the archaic stages which were still plying on Fifth Avenue and began their rattling, creaking course toward the Bowery. The motion, not so remote from that of a ship in a storm, so soothed the mariners that they failed to note the little farebox in front, into which they were supposed to drop their money, and were equally oblivious to the repeated ringing of the impatient driver.

At last the shabby jehu opened a tiny trap-door near his seat and yelled in no very considerate tones:—

"Hey, you in there; ain't you never goin' to pay your fare?"

"In course we be," cried Artemas shrilly, aroused at this imputation against his comrades, "an' ye needn't be so consarned peart about it, nuther. But whar's yer conductor, or whatever ye calls him, that takes the cash?"

"Aw, drop it into the box, you, you——"

The driver's voice failed him through sheer disgust, and he thereafter did his best to make his vehi-

cle jolt and sway, all ignorant of the actual satisfaction he was giving to his queer fares. At the end of the stage line the three disembarked and stood for a moment in the middle of the sidewalk, unmindful of the frowns and jibes of hurrying pedestrians. They were in a quandary, for Artemas showed signs of being out of his reckoning. He scratched his head, wet his finger and held it to the wind, and looked around for weathervanes.

"I disremember the exact chart," he quavered, "but the course should be about east by sou' east from this ere squar'."

"Ask somebody," growled the captain.

"What?" squeaked the old man indignantly, "me a sailor, an' *ask* somebody like a gol darned landlubber. I've been here afore, I tells yer. Come along."

There was nothing for it but to follow Artemas's guidance, and they proceeded meekly enough. After hairbreadth escapes before horses and street cars, and many a jostling from passers-by—for they insisted on walking three abreast—they actually did reach the Bowery of Hank's desire, as the lampposts and other signs gave conclusive evidence. Artemas was radiant with triumph.

"*Now* messmates," he exclaimed, "will yer say I didn't know the sailin' round York?"

"No, no, Artemas," returned Hank soothingly, "ye've done a great trick at the wheel; we thanks yer hearty." And he shook the old fellow by the hand with dignified approval.

The musketeers' voyage down the famous thor-

oughfare was a memorable one. Their quaint dress, their odd faces, their unmistakable air of innocence of urban customs, marked them as fair game for the street arabs who followed along in their wake, shouting stanzas of comic songs deemed applicable to the trio, and asking questions not always delicate in intent.

Once a flashy individual with a deeply belled silk hat and a fierce black moustache rushed up to Sykes with an air of the utmost gratification, and seized his hand cordially.

"Ah, is this—can it be my old farmer friend, Ephraim Tucker, of Newcastle, New Jersey? Don't remember me, eh? But how should you? I was a mere boy when——"

"Yer off'n yer course, shipmate," replied the captain jovially, rather pitying the genial stranger's disappointment. "Fer I ain't Ephraim Tucker, nor I ain't never clapped my binnacles on Newcastle, New Jersey; whiles as fer farmin', Lord love ye, I don't know a rake from a corncob. My name's——"

At this interesting moment a policeman sauntered toward the three explorers, and the cordial man seemed to have forgotten an important engagement, for he dropped Sykes's hand as if it were fire, and hurried around the corner without ceremony.

"Hey, you fellers," said the officer brusquely, "want to separate yourselves from all the money you've got? Know who that man is?"

Hank paled, Artemas shivered and Sykes clutched his wallet tenaciously.

"No," they answered in unison.

"Well, old chaps, that's 'Handsome Joe,' the slickest bunco-steerer in New York City."

A cunning look came into Artemas's deep-set eyes. Here was a trick of some sort, a mean attempt to discredit the genial stranger.

"No siree, he ain't no steerer of no sort; he ain't never had his hand on a tiller or a wheel in his life; I kin tell by the cut o' his jib. Ye don't come thet on us, not by a long shot."

"Oh, well, just as you please, old 'un," returned the bluecoat. "I wash my hands of you, that's all."

Yet on the whole the three friends had a very pleasant forenoon on the Bowery, and had the satisfaction of seeing that they created something of a sensation. They feasted on peanuts and bananas; they were weighed on dial-machines; they blew into a lung tester, which Sykes almost ruined with a tremendous puff; they lunched royally at a dime restaurant on baked beans and griddle cakes; they then found a row of comfortable chairs under an awning, into which they climbed to smoke their pipes, only to discover that it was a bootblacking establishment, and that they must submit to and pay for a polishing, and finally they trudged along to find a theatre, that *ultima thule* of all provincial visitors to the great city.

The "Pan-Olympian" pleased their fastidious tastes, because its exterior was very red and very yellow, and brilliant posters promised excellent entertainment within. The prices of tickets were ten, twenty and thirty cents, and as Hank insisted that the best was not a bit too good, they soon found

themselves in orchestra seats well toward the stage.

The piece that afternoon was a melodrama of the fine old sort in which villainy runs rampant for four acts, only to be crushed to earth with a tremendous thud in the fifth. To the simple old salts, no one of whom had ever been in a playhouse before, the mimic scenes were intensely real. The harrowing sufferings of the heroine stirred their manly hearts to pity, and they moved uneasily in their seats as woe was piled upon anguish and horror upon both.

At last came one of the most widely advertised scenes in the play; the villain was to seize the heroine by the hair and drag her about the stage, laughing in fiendish glee. The lovely girl was prone upon the floor and the evil gentleman had grasped her tresses preparatory to the great feat of realism, when Sykes, unable to control himself, arose in his seat and shook his huge fist at the actor.

"Avast thar," he roared angrily, "let that thar gal alone, ye consarned sculpin, or I'll——"

The house was in an uproar in a moment. Jeers, whistles, cat-calls and cries of "sit down" and "put him out" made a bedlam of the place. There were shouts of laughter, too, for many thought the interruption a clever trick of the management, and expressed their approval of the captain's "make-up." But he, nothing daunted, his chivalrous soul thinking only of duty to be performed, started down the aisle on the work of rescue.

"Come back, ye gol darned fool," piped Artemas, "don't ye know it's only actin' out?"

Sykes would have climbed upon the stage, but that two burly attachés of the theatre seized him forthwith. Then Hank and Artemas, rushing to his aid, were also made prisoners, and the whole party was dragged to the sidewalk, and a policeman summoned.

"Well, by cracky," exclaimed that functionary in astonishment, as he surveyed the rueful trio. "If here ain't the old 'uns I warned about 'Handsome Joe.' Disturbin' the peace, eh? I'm afraid I'll have to run you in, my ancient friends." And he stepped to a signal box on a lamppost, opened it and said something into a telephone. In a few minutes a long, covered wagon drawn by a fat and lazy horse, and carrying a couple of additional officers, heaved in sight. It backed up against the curb for its passengers.

"Now then, you're goin' to have a nice ride at the city's expense," chuckled the policeman. "Get in."

The poor, bewildered mariners were about to obey, when suddenly there broke through the dense crowd of curiosity seekers the figure of James Anderson, who had had no difficulty in following their trail through the Bowery.

No vessel bearing down upon shipwrecked sailors on a raft was ever a more welcome sight than was the well-known face to the beleaguered men. Anderson quickly became informed of the situation, and he went at once to the proprietor of the theatre. That gentleman came forward with apologies, and requested the release of the prisoners; and as James

supplemented this with a certain transaction of hands, the tars were set free. A cab was called, and Anderson bundled the old fellows into it.

"Number —— Fifth Avenue," he directed the driver.

"Must be a museum," jeered somebody in the crowd, and the others set up a shout as the vehicle rolled away.

It so happened that one of the spectators of the discomfiture and rescue of the three was another Old Chetford man of former days, Guy Hamilton, who had been called into the district by his desire to see a certain lawyer of rather shady reputation. Noting the tumult, he had joined the crowd in idle fashion, and had been startled to see James Anderson and the three sailors. All the bitter hatred he bore the man who had once struck him was overmastered by curiosity, and he went as near as possible without detection to the centre of disturbance.

He heard Hank say something about Agatha's probable displeasure and he caught the number given by Anderson to the driver. There was no doubt about it—she was in New York, and living in an aristocratic quarter. With characteristic reasoning he jumped at the conclusion that she was spending what remained of the Copeland money in a life of gaiety. Further particulars he must have, and he forthwith employed the Bowery lawyer, who was not above playing detective for a consideration, to investigate for him. The old spirit moved within him, and he determined to renew the acquaintance with Agatha if there were any possible way to do so.

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The musketeers had had enough of life in the metropolis, and on the following day they took the boat for Fall River. Not one of them could be persuaded to go by train, if a boat could be found to take them.

"Them pesky trains are so dangerous," declared Sykes, the hero of more thrilling escapes from perils of the sea than any man in Old Chetford.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SKIRMISH LINE

WITHIN the next fortnight Ralph Harding saw many things in the brown-stone house that convinced him that a critical mental and spiritual crisis was near at hand in the life of the woman he had vowed to save from herself. From the reports of James Anderson he learned more.

The honest coachman and guardian of his mistress's outward welfare used to make pleasant little pilgrimages down to Harding's lodgings, and there, through the persuasive aid of pipes, they would sit and plan bright things for Agatha, one of them, at least, dreading that they might never come to pass. Harding could not feel that he was breaking the proprieties in any sense by this familiarity with a servant, for Anderson's long service, absolute loyalty and keen penetration raised him to the position of confidential friend. So the two who loved Agatha, each in his own fashion, talked of her as if she were a girl, whose interests were in their keeping.

One evening Anderson came with curious news. Three days before, he said, a lot of workmen had arrived with wire and some strange-looking machines, which they had taken to the library. Other

laborers had performed some mysterious operations on the roof, and since then the library had been kept locked, and his mistress had spent most of her daytimes inside. All he could tell was that a peculiar clicking, "like the sound of a horse champing a bit" could be heard faintly from the hall.

The minister knew from experience that Agatha's evenings were more than ever given up to social gaieties. He rarely mingled in them, although invited cordially enough, for he felt that he did not speak the language of the flippant and artificial set by which she was surrounded. And then came the old, old question: to what extent did the girl's soul actually participate in this existence? Was she merely a chameleon, changing color with each set of surroundings, or would she at last become permanently tinged with frivolity from being a part of it so long? Although he still believed in her nobility of nature, he sighed at the difficulty of the problem.

But to Harding the real, the hideous menace to Agatha's happiness was the continued presence of Atherton in her house. He now knew the antecedents of that sleek sensualist, knew his disregard for the honor of womankind, and to learn that he was a favored visitor, as well as the girl's escort to places of amusement, was as of the bitterness of gall to the minister's highly organized nature.

With all his indignation, however, Harding felt that neither he nor the world knew the truth that must be behind Agatha's apparent preference for the financier. Best of all men living, he thought, he

understood her nature; it was preposterous to believe that she could feel any sympathy with a man of Atherton's stamp. Nor was it possible to deceive her now, as in the days of Guy Hamilton. But here was the fact of favors bestowed, and it haunted him.

After considerable of this self-communion he suddenly grew disgusted with himself and his "moonings," as he termed them. Was he to think and dream and hope forever, and do nothing? Where was his reputation as a practical man? He had won many another from a dangerous road, and why should he shrink now because it was the woman he loved who needed help? He determined to take the initiative boldly, and try to interest her in other directions—perhaps in some plan of his own—and at least distract her impressionable nature from its morbidness. He would go to her at once. And with that decision a bit of sunlight seemed already to cut into the gloom.

Almost at that very moment Agatha was in the midst of a deep discussion with Atherton in her library. The broker's little eyes shone with a satisfaction not wholly derived from the matter they were outlining. His friends who declared that he never mixed business and pleasure did not know their man; they had been right simply because he had never before met a business woman who was also alluringly feminine. The Countess talked of stocks like an intelligent man, and his commercial ear heard her with respect; she breathed adorable womanly charm, and he drank that in with the thirst

of the senses. Had Agatha chosen to be Delilah, she could have shorn this financial Samson without a protest on his part.

"So you think the situation in 'United Mines' is favorable to us, do you, Mr. Atherton?" asked Agatha.

"As favorable as I am able to make it," he replied. "But I will be frank with you, and tell you that I have not quite a controlling interest in it. We let more of the stock slip into the market than we intended, and somebody is holding on like grim death. If I only knew for a surety what Hamilton holds, I would be better satisfied. Of course he and I could combine, and do as we chose with the company; but if he should get offish and unite his big holdings with others, they could—well, they could make it unpleasant for me. But I don't think that can happen; I don't see how he can get control without my knowing it."

"Then if one could gain the confidence of this—Mr. Hamilton, and find out just what he owns of the 'United Mines' stock——"

"It might make a very great difference to me and to you," he replied. "If he has not got control, we can beat him by buying the outstanding stock at any price, and then vote that exchange with the 'shorts' I spoke to you about. If he has, we are at his mercy so far as this deal is concerned, because he could then go over to the enemy, compel the company to abandon my plan, and make a barrel of money by going short on the stocks of the amalgamated companies. He would beat the

'corner,' and you and I would fail to get our profits. The great question is how he stands on 'United Mines.' He says he has not got control; I don't believe him, somehow. I wish I knew."

"Perhaps I can find out."

"You?" he asked wonderingly.

"Yes—that is, I—I think I may be able to ascertain."

"But you don't know Hamilton."

"There are many ways in which one can get information in the market," she returned.

"If we can find out positively how Hamilton is situated in the matter," said Atherton, "all will be clear sailing."

The broker departed a little later on excellent terms with himself. Not only had he apparently become a needful element in this attractive woman's life, but he was in a fair way to have the whip-hand over Hamilton. As for Agatha's financial interest in the "United Mines" scheme, that was bound to turn out to his advantage, he thought, whichever way it resulted. If he and Agatha won, he would reap the reward of her gratitude; if they lost, she might need his help financially, and that he would pour out lavishly. But he would win; the dice were loaded; he was victor even before the cast.

Coming down the steps he met Harding. He bowed graciously, showing his white teeth with a sinister smile. He had at first feared the "parson," but of late had seen so little of him at the house as to drop him from consideration. He could afford,

therefore, to be magnanimous. The minister nodded stiffly; he would not play a part with such a man.

Harding was told by a servant that the Countess would see him in the library. There he found her at a desk in a maze of papers, pamphlets, reports, balance-sheets and yellow tissues. A "ticker" at her right side was tapping out its monotonous song, and a beautiful desk-telephone was within easy reach of her left hand. She turned with a bright smile.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Harding," she said. "You have not been any too sociable of late. Are you, too, busy—as I am?" and she drew his attention to the financial paraphernalia with a comprehensive sweep of her pretty hand.

"Yes, Agatha, very busy. But not, I fancy, in a very profitable way pecuniarily. Your occupation, I suppose, is more to the point in dollars and cents," he said quizzically, tapping the tape-basket as he spoke.

"I told you once that I should get money," she retorted. "Well—I am getting it. Is there any harm in that?"

"No harm in itself, Agatha, perhaps, but do you ever think of the result of continued gambling on a nature like yours? Don't you fear the effect of the tense excitement of the robber game of stocks, the devil-take-the-hindmost spirit that actuates every deal in the market? Can you play with fire and not be burned? Can you live in the malarial belt of Wall Street, and not catch the fever? I would

rather see you the poorest of the poor than to have you dragged down to spiritual ruin by the weight of gold thus obtained."

The girl flushed, and her eyes glinted with resentment. What right had this man, old friend though he were, to talk to her thus, to assume proprietorship over her affairs, to try to block the course of her righteous resolve? Far away in the shade other figures were calling for vengeance; their thin and eerie voices were more powerful than even the musical tones of this earnest, virile helper of souls.

"I am grateful—I have always been grateful to you, Mr. Harding," she said, "for your kindly interest in me. But now that I am a woman I must help myself. I have a work to do—you know how sacred a work. I am doing it by the only means possible. I have no fear for myself."

"But your happiness, Agatha?"

She looked at him almost scornfully.

"Long ago I said that when I had achieved fortune and social position, I should have too much to do to think of trying to be happy. It has come true."

"Ah, but this exacting life of yours—you look weary."

She laughed, but not with the merriment of old days.

"I never felt better. I need work, and more work, and still more work!"

"Then, Agatha, listen. If you need something more than you get from your society life and your

finance—and God knows I believe you ought to have it—why cannot you spare some of your time to me, to the things I am trying to do to make miserable hearts a little less wretched? I know of some strange cases of suffering just now for which a woman's hand is needed. Can you help?"

All her feminine sympathy came to the surface at his earnest words and the expression on his fine, pleading face. For the first time in years she thought of the past without bitterness, of the old days in the Copeland house before sorrow had withered a single petal of the roses in her spring garden of happiness.

"In years gone by," she said very slowly and tenderly, "you were kind enough to devote a part of two days each week to my education and culture; I will give two afternoons a week to you and your interests."

After Harding had gone, his heart full of thanksgiving, Agatha turned to her "ticker" and her telephone. She called up a great many numbers which financial experts would have recognized as appertaining to brokers' offices, and to each answering voice she gave orders about like this:—

"Buy 'Huronide,' 'Gotham and Michigan,' 'Don Quixote,' 'Norumbega' and 'Cross-Cut' at the market. Buy all you can get, but in small lots. Keep the prices down if possible."

Then she began writing hurriedly, and for a long time her pen kept pace with the clack of the "ticker." At last she threw it down wearily.

"Heigho," she sighed, "I shall be glad when three o'clock comes. Then I shall be free from the necessity of watching you, you old monster," and she shook her small fist in mock anger at the garrulous machine at her side.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN AMBUSCADE

FROM afar-off Guy Hamilton heard enough of Agatha Renier's beauty, brilliancy and charm to make him thirst like a traveler in the desert at the sight of an oasis of blue waters and green trees. Mirage or not he did not know, nor did he stop to think. Only he was certain, from what his lawyer-detective had gleaned, and from the newspaper accounts of the Countess's victorious passage through the social "forbidden country," that the once fascinating girl had become a magnet that seemed to draw him ever forward—perhaps the more irresistibly because its power was unseen. It was that infatuation of memory which often casts a tinge of glory about its object, strengthened by the half-jealousy that shakes a man of strong passions at the thought that a woman once almost his own is kept from him by a strong guard of other courtiers.

He heard of Atherton's apparent supremacy in the Fifth Avenue house and a bitter hatred filled his heart. That his financial chief—or, at least, one who deemed himself so—should be in the place he ought to occupy at the side of a beautiful girl, was an added blow of fate.

But the past! Despite his attempts to placate conscience with the theory that he had been the victim of circumstance, he knew that Agatha had a clear and tenacious memory. A woman will forget a wrong when she feels that a man can right it by allowing her to love him; but here there was no opportunity even for attempting such reinstatement. He believed that should he go to her house in a desperate attempt to see her, she would have him thrust out of doors like some importunate and unworthy beggar.

He racked his brain to find something that would make a visit even plausible, but all his ingenuity stopped short, and he cursed his impotence to devise a plan.

Time was when he would have turned from his perplexity to the reassuring spirit of drink, but for three years he had kept his old enemy almost completely under subjection. His reentrance into the field of speculation after the Waterloo which resulted in his becoming a forger, had opened his eyes to one important fact: iron nerves were needed for the successful playing of the great game of Wall Street; it was a question under which king he should serve, Alcohol or Mammon, and he chose the latter. Then, too, his peculiar nature found in the excitement of the market a substitute for the artificial stimulus of liquor. Even in the days at Old Chetford, when he had drunk heavily, it had been for a mental result, never from a physical cause.

Fate's favorites are very often the unworthy, and Hamilton had prospered from the first day of his

rehabiliment. As his associate Atherton had said, he had become in less than two years one of the luckiest as well as the most unscrupulous of plungers. He was always up to his ears in heavy obligations which the least breeze of misfortune would have raised above his head. But at every critical point something would occur to his advantage, and he would emerge triumphant and money-laden. As a result he had come to have a Napoleonic faith in his luck.

All this applied to the playing of the game of gold; but a new interest had arisen, and he felt the full force of the old adage: "Lucky at cards, unlucky in love." Yes, he was willing to call it love now, foolish as it seemed in a man who scarcely knew whom he was worshipping.

He finally worked himself into an intensely nervous and unstrung condition. One night he paced back and forth for a long time opposite Agatha's house. He saw a carriage, with James Anderson on the box beside the driver, draw up to the fine front and discharge a passenger. He hurried away without another look, for he could not yet nerve himself to see the woman of his dreams, even at a distance. He cursed himself for his cowardice, yet seemed to be a toy in the hand of destiny.

But at last the inevitable sight of her came. She stepped from her brougham at Sherry's one afternoon just as he passed on the other side. She did not see him, but he had a full, though fleeting, look at the beautiful, changed face, and it made his infatuation complete. It was the Agatha of every

roseate vision, yet with something more compelling than he could have imagined.

That night he slept little. It terrified him, almost, to think that the Agatha Renier whom his aunt had befriended in her pretty poverty, and whom he had insulted in his drink-fanned passion, had become this radiant woman, courted for her beauty and admired for her intellect.

Through his excited brain there rolled the pictures of the days when she, a simple child, would hang upon his elaborate stories of what had occurred in "society"—the society of Old Chetford, he thought with a smile—and he would encourage her and tell her that she was worthy to take her place anywhere. What a fulfilment of his prophecy! But what grim satire in it all!

Once he conceived the idea of writing to her, and actually began two or three letters. He almost persuaded himself that he had a reasonable excuse for communicating with her. When he had begun to make money in the market one of his first acts had been to send his aunt a draft for $5,000 with accrued interest, to cover the amount of which he had robbed her by his forgery. The letter had come back unopened to his address as printed on the envelope. He had retained it and its contents intact, through some impulse of self-reproach that he himself did not fully understand. He thought of making this letter a peg upon which to hang a note to Agatha, but upon reflection it seemed too slender.

Several weeks passed by, and then Guy Hamilton met the Countess Fornay face to face. It was at a

reception given by the French consul, a volatile gentleman who added charm and variety to his official life by a considerable dabbling in stocks. He had profited by some of Guy's deals, and looked up to him as a veritable giant of the market, to whom now, for the first time, he was glad to pay social attention.

Hamilton was talking to his host, an animated little replica of the Third Napoleon, when he saw Agatha approaching with the consul's wife. He would have fled incontinently, but his muscles seemed to defy his will.

"Countess, allow me to present to you one of our Wall Street friends, Mr. Guy Hamilton; Mr. Hamilton, this is the Countess Fornay."

Guy stared straight ahead, his eyes fixed stupidly on a marble bust of Pandora at the end of the room. He even wondered if, among all the woes set free by the mythical girl, there were any like retribution come home at last. Then her words, clear and beautifully modulated in the well-remembered contralto voice, struck upon his ear like an awakening bell.

"Mr. Hamilton and I have met before, in my early days," she said.

"Ah," returned their hostess, "then you will wish to talk over the old times; I will leave you."

They stood facing one another in silent thought for a moment. He felt that it was incumbent upon him to speak, but knew not what to say. She clenched her fingers with such savagery that the marks in her palms were visible for days. The fate in which she trusted had brought this meeting,

which she had believed inevitable; but now that it was here she found it difficult to enact the rôle she had so often rehearsed. By a supreme effort she steeled herself to play her part.

"Well, Mr. Hamilton, Madame Bouvet will scarcely believe we have met before," she said coldly.

"I—I—didn't expect to see you here," stammered the man.

"Oh, the Bouvets are very dear friends of mine. They were kind to me in Paris, and I could not fail to be present at an affair in which they have so much pride."

The unreality of the meeting was intensified for Guy by the calmly conventional tones of Agatha's speech. Remembering their last words years ago he wondered what had happened to make this emotionless conversation possible.

"Are not the decorations superb?" she asked. "Let us walk about a bit, and see them."

Like a man in a dream he went by her side through the handsome rooms, noting with a pang the countless salutations she received, the eagerness of many to pay her attention. He wondered if this very change in her life might not furnish the key to the alteration of her sentiments toward him; perhaps the new conditions, the complete knowledge of the world, had thrust out the old bitterness from her mind.

This theory at last took complete possession of him, and, after he was separated from her by one of those kaleidoscopic changes best known to social functions, and had time to muse in an obscure cor-

ner, his satisfaction was so self-flattering that he decided to ask permission to call.

He saw Agatha just before she was leaving, radiant, glowing with comeliness and proud of her triumphs. Why should others rush in where he dared not tread, he asked himself. He would dare, too.

"Good night, Countess," he said humbly. "May I be permitted to see you—to call upon you? There are some things——"

"Certainly; I am at home Thursdays," was all she dared say.

In her carriage she had the first opportunity to reflect upon what she had done. How she hated him. How the mere touch of his hand seemed to contaminate her! And she hated herself scarcely less intensely. She could rub her hand on the edge of her cloak, and feel it somehow purified; but her soul she could not rid of its taint. Yet she must go on. Some day there would come a great moral cleansing, and she could hang her smirched self-esteem out to dry.

Hamilton's days until the following Thursday were full of uneasiness and apprehension. What if she were waiting to pour out upon him the full vials of her wrath and scorn in the privacy of her own house? He was half inclined not to see her; he had made no positive engagement. But then came the thought of the others, and jealousy gave him strength.

Agatha was alone when he was ushered in. She saw his embarrassment, and tried to put him at ease.

Their talk was conventional for a while, till he could no longer steer away from the subject that he knew must arise sooner or later. He spoke with humiliating self-contempt of his forgery, and asked her to believe that it was undertaken only at the direst necessity and with the solemn intent to pay back the money. In proof of this he showed the letter and the draft of restitution.

She listened with apparent kindliness, and helped him in the difficult task of excusing himself. Then he went a step further back in both their lives, and attempted to refer to the days in the Copeland house. She only smiled.

"I hoped you had forgotten that youthful folly," she said. "Perhaps I was quite as much to blame as anyone. We are men and women of the world now, and can afford to forget the misunderstandings of the past."

He was surprised and delighted that the obstacles to winning back her favor were so easily removed. The old bonhomie returned, and he chatted easily and entertainingly of stocks, spurred on by skilful questioning. He was on sure ground now, and Agatha found that his information as to certain market conditions was most useful. Of the status of the "United Mines" operation and his connection therewith, she learned enough to warrant the writing of a note to Atherton as soon as he had gone.

"Faugh!" she exclaimed, as she set to work at her desk, with pads and memorandum books for

her only companions, "the price we have to pay for success is heart-sickening sometimes. What if Ralph Harding were right? But even if he were, I shall carry my work through to the end, and when it is finished—why, then we shall see whether Agatha Renier is better or worse for it."

CHAPTER XXXV

"TO FORGIVE DIVINE"

HARDING, with the quick intuition of affection, had already begun to see the traces upon Agatha's face of the wearing, grinding life she had chosen so deliberately. Even if he had not learned from his ally, James Anderson, of the visit of Hamilton, followed by several others within a fortnight, and of the girl's frequent interviews with Atherton, he would have known from her appearance that she was under a great mental strain.

Even the allurements of society were now relentlessly cut off in favor of the new and absorbing interests that clustered about the glass-covered machine in her library. She went nowhere, excusing herself on the plea of ill-health, and she held no more functions in the fine house. Society wondered, and then ceased to inquire about her. The papers hinted at all sorts of mysteries—that the beautiful Countess was immersed in the writing of a new book that was to set New York altogether by the ears; that she was deeply interested in holy things and might soon take the veil, and, finally, that some unhappy love affair had cast a deep gloom over her hitherto sunny nature and that the world might hope to see her no more.

She read these things, smiled contemptuously, and worked the harder.

So far as Hamilton was concerned the minister felt, as in the case of Atherton, that Agatha was using him as pawn in the development of her game of vengeance, the playing of which he feared was becoming a mania with her.

One afternoon he had another earnest talk with her. He did not reach the house till after three, for he had learned from experience that she rarely left her library or cared to see anyone until the stock market had closed. He found her wearied, *distraite,* full of moody silence that told that this was the moment to strike if he wished to do any good. He implored her by their old friendship, by the memory of Mrs. Copeland, who had planned so zealously for her welfare, to care for herself, to cease the cruel punishment of her nerves through her slavery to the monster of the quotations-tape.

"If this thing continues, Agatha," he said, attempting diplomacy, "you cannot hope to do the work you have set your heart upon. You are playing upon a single string of your emotions; when that breaks, what is to happen? No more harmony, Agatha; a ruined and useless harp. Can you afford to run such risks?"

This practical way of putting her case appealed to the girl's mind; that he could see by the thoughtful look in her eyes. Now to arouse her heart, and the first step toward victory would be taken.

"You have suffered, it is true," he went on. "But do you know that in this great bedlam of a town there

are thousands whose tortures of soul are tenfold greater than any you can even imagine? You said the other day that you would give me two afternoons a week whenever I should call for them. Why not one to-morrow?"

With the mood of pity strong upon her she replied: "I shall be glad to go—to help, if possible. Shall I take—money? I am willing, you know, to do—anything."

"Not to-morrow. I shall show you human beings beyond the reach of conventional charity. Some other time, perhaps——"

When he had gone, Agatha, still full of her new tenderness, went to her room and took a packet of letters from the little satinwood box her grandfather had made long ago. Her eyes filled with the gentle mist of a revived sorrow. Then another thought came to her heart, perhaps for the first time, as she saw the many envelopes addressed "Mrs. Sarah Copeland, Hotel Richelieu, Paris, France," in the bold and symmetrical handwriting of Ralph Harding.

"Why did he never write to me?" she asked herself, trembling with a strange emotion that she only half-heartedly tried to subdue. For the first time in many weeks she drew forth the picture of her mother and kissed it as in girlhood days. Then she replaced it with loving care and closed the box. Suddenly she remembered that Atherton was to call on the morrow, and she went to the telephone.

"I shall not be at home to-morrow afternoon," she said, "so if you will call this evening then we can

talk over the last necessary steps of our deal—the 'U. M.,' you know."

Agatha's carriage was in front of Harding's house early the next afternoon.

"Now," she exclaimed brightly, as the minister opened the brougham door, "I am at your service. Command my driver."

She had expected an immediate pilgrimage to the horrors of the East Side tenement region, and was astonished when they stopped before a splendid apartment house on Madison Avenue. In a handsome suite they found a wealthy widow, whose son lay crippled and speechless on a bed of pain. But the chief sufferer was the mother, through whose lack of caution had occurred the accident that had brought her idol low. Her agony of self-blame had finally settled into deep melancholy as it was seen how hopeless was the case of her son, and it was this that Harding sought, in his lovable and manly way, to banish.

"Oh, if he could only speak to forgive me, or even to reproach me, I could endure it," she was wont to say.

It was the minister's mission to try to lighten this morbid grief, to stimulate new interests where the cripple was concerned. It was a hard task, but he had persevered until he had, at least, aroused respect and admiration in the burdened heart.

Upon Agatha, who had been warmly welcomed by the sufferer as an old friend of her counsellor, this visit made a profound impression. She saw as never before the compelling charm of Harding, she realized

the soothing power of his voice, and, as they rode away from the place, she felt proud that the man beside her was her friend. A warm physical delight in life took possession of her; she was glad to be near this wholesome man on this beautiful afternoon. He chatted entertainingly about his various "cases," little dreaming of the very personal form his diversion for Agatha was taking. And it was well for his peace of mind that he did not.

Next they visited a writer of books whose young wife was a confirmed dipsomaniac. For the elysium of alcohol the beautiful woman would trample honor, truth and self-respect in the mud, only to awake to the frightful torture of broken nerves and intense self-loathing. Either before or after one of her sensuous outbursts Harding had a peculiarly magnetic influence upon the woman, and the literary husband had often called the minister from his bed in the dead of night to come to the work of mercy. Agatha caught a glimpse of the poor creature, and the sight of her bloated face and red eyelids haunted her for many a day.

These things and many more the girl saw, and in all of them there was some peculiar element that showed Harding's originality in the matter of doing good. She was impressed for the time being, but the force that held the citadel of her soul was still too strong to be dislodged, and she returned to her schemes with scarcely abated zeal.

Several days after this trip Harding suddenly appeared at the Fifth Avenue house in a cab, and asked Agatha if she could come with him at once. It was

not one of his afternoons, she reminded him pleasantly, and she was afraid she could not spare the time.

"I would not trouble you, Agatha," he said, "but a dying woman has asked that you might come to her."

The deep solemnity of his tone and a subtle something in his face had its effect upon her, and she made no further remonstrance, but put on the simple attire she was accustomed to wear when on her rounds with him, and they were soon being rapidly driven toward the lower East Side in a direction they had several times taken before.

A throng of conflicting emotions surged through the girl's mind as they proceeded on their way. More and more, she told herself, with a thrill of impatience, she was obeying the behests of this strong personality. What did it mean, and where would it end? Would he at last win her from her allegiance to duty as she conceived it? No, that should never be, she thought almost fiercely. He was good and kind, and doubtless believed that he was right; but there were different standards for different natures, and who should say that hers was not as lofty as any? For some time neither spoke; then it was she who broke the silence.

"Is it the Cartwright woman who is dying?

"No, Agatha," he replied, with an accent that somehow precluded any further inquiry.

The carriage drew up before a tenement house which Agatha did not remember to have seen. It was a shabby building, but with some brave attempts at gentility. Up four flights of stairs they climbed,

assailed by the odors of coarse cookery and the cries of fretful children.

A woman in the garb of a nurse opened a door in response to Harding's ring.

"Is she—?" he whispered.

"Still alive, but very low," was the reply.

Agatha, vaguely wondering why she should be brought to a death-bed, gazed about the two rooms visible from the hallway. They were pitifully bare of furniture, but the few remaining pieces showed that the apartments had once boasted better things than could have been expected in such a place. Evidently the awful pressure of poverty had gradually squeezed all the comforts from the rooms to the pawnshops.

"Come," said the minister, beckoning to his companion, and, as they crossed the threshold he whispered gently: "Remember, she has but a few moments to live."

And there, stretched upon a bed from which she would never rise again in life, Agatha saw Lucy Worth-Courtleigh.

The poor, pallid face, wasted by disease and drawn by mental suffering, had lost all of its loveliness. Only the rich beauty of the hair remained of all the glowing treasures of comeliness that had once been so admired. Yet somehow the countenance had been purified, as if by bitter repentance and the conquest of a weak and shallow nature by an immortal soul.

No one spoke and no one moved for, it seemed to Agatha, interminable hours. And yet this meeting, totally unexpected as it was, gave no shock to the

girl. The solemnity of the scene, the hovering presence of the angel of death, robbed the situation of all but its aspect of human suffering.

At last Harding said gently to the frail figure upon the bed: "Agatha is here."

The head on the pillow turned with painful deliberation, and into the dimmed eyes came a transitory gleam of recognition. A thin finger beckoned slowly to Agatha, and she leaned over toward the bloodless lips.

"I sent for you," came the thin and trembling tones, like some ghostly utterance from another world, "to beg your forgiveness. I felt—that with it I could have more hope of the—forgiveness of the hereafter. No, don't speak. I did you a terrible wrong, but I was mad—mad with outraged pride, jealousy, infatuation."

The grip of mortal pain throttled her utterance, and she lay for a minute inert and like one dead. Agatha raised her head tenderly and moistened the trembling lips with water.

"I wronged you," the pitiful voice resumed, "and I wronged another. But for me Guy Hamilton might have been a different man. I have been told, too, by Mr. Harding that my wretched letter was attributed to him."

There was a swift gesture from Agatha at this confession, and Harding turned quickly, fearful as to what might follow. But he saw the beautiful face he loved so well looking down on the dying woman with a gaze of divine compassion. It was the victory of an awakening soul.

"I sent for you — to beg your forgiveness."

"Bitter has been my punishment and bitter my repentance," quavered the dying woman. "If you can find it in your heart to pity, if not forgive, I shall die more easily."

Agatha opened her lips to speak, but the other lifted a warning finger.

"Wait one moment. I have done what I could to make reparation. . . . Mr. Harding, give me the packet."

The minister drew from his pocket a large envelope and gave it to Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh. She in turn placed it in Agatha's disengaged hand.

"There," she said faintly, "is my sworn statement of the facts—my confession of the greatest sin, great sinner though I have been, of my life. It will exonerate you, if my own disgrace has not already done so. Think well before you answer. Can you forgive me?"

* * * * * * * *

Harding had left the room a little before, for he believed that the scene was too sacred for even his kindly presence. In a few minutes Agatha joined him, pressing her handkerchief to her tear-stained eyes. She pointed to the inner room with a gesture more eloquent than words. He left her, but returned almost immediately.

"All is over," he said quietly to the nurse, "and, thank God, all's well."

Then, with the grandeur of the presence of death still about them, they sought their carriage in the squalid street below.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TIGHTENING THE NOOSE

THE progress of the great *coup* in "United Mines" was rapid, and it was satisfactory to Atherton for more reasons than the merely financial. Besides the profits he expected to make, would be involved the defeat of Hamilton, who, he now felt sure, was attempting his overthrow in the councils of the new company; and finally—most roseate thought of all—he would be able to appeal to the Countess Fornay as the maker of her fortune and the possessor of a magnificent one of his own. He would then stand in double favor as a suitor.

He knew himself well, this shrewd manipulator of others, and he felt that in his personality was little to attract a woman of Agatha's qualities. He felt, too, that her hot pursuit of money in the market, her placing herself in dangerous situations, was not for any small object. The key to her secret, was, without doubt, her ambition to become a woman of great fortune, and with that golden lever to pry open the doors of the socially elect of New York. Ah, how he would slave and plan and grasp opportunities in order to be able to gratify her imperious desire;

with the elaborate setting that wealth could give he felt that he could pass muster.

So he had been weaving his web for several weeks, tightening a thread here, breaking another there, but ever sitting in the center, fat, bloated, apparently asleep. By and by, when the flies, which to him were Hamilton and the public, should be where he wanted them he would strike. His scheme had changed two or three times in as many weeks. At first it was merely to invest the money Agatha had entrusted to him—some $25,000—together with $40,000 of his own, in the quiet purchase of enough "United Mines" to give him control. But he found it impossible to get hold of a sufficient quantity in the open market. Hamilton had evidently taken alarm, and was gripping his shares tenaciously. Atherton had found that his associate was holding a great portion of his stock on margin, and that the demand inspired by himself merely sent up the price and made Guy's position more secure. He had learned, too, from Agatha that Hamilton had told the truth when he said that he did not control. There was one thing to do, a dangerous, audacious thing—but he would do it.

As the scheme flourished, so did his infatuation for the woman involved in it. Her beauty called loudly to his senses, while her keen wit, her clear financial vision, her intellectual grasp of stock "situations," appealed powerfully to his mind. The unusual combination was irresistible.

But shrewd as he was, he failed to consider that Agatha might be playing her own game in the mar-

ket quite apart from his tender care, which, in fact, she was doing. Using information from both Atherton and Hamilton, she employed the fluctuations in the smaller stocks that formed the "United Mines" to her great advantage. She made money rapidly, and, flushed with success, felt herself completely ready for Atherton's promised stroke that was to shake Wall Street and ruin Guy Hamilton. Her plan would have astonished the rosy-faced broker who adored her, for it involved his own defeat as well as that of his rival. She felt justified in attempting to humble him, for his coarseness had given her frequent offense, and she despised his proposed treachery to his business associate and friend. Once the battle were over, and she a victor, she could teach him his place.

For Hamilton, however, she had no pity. Although the scene at Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh's deathbed had affected her deeply, it had increased rather than lessened her bitterness toward the man, for, in spite of the wretched woman's self-accusation, she held him in great measure responsible for luring a wife from her honor and duty; his arts of fascination she knew too well. She would crush him, and by her own hand alone, although she now knew that Atherton would have brought about his ruin had she not existed.

One evening when she was nursing her impatience at the long-continued failure of Atherton to launch his thunderbolt, she received a note which read:—

"I shall come to your house to-morrow before the

market opens—and stay until it closes, perhaps. In that privacy I can work to better advantage. H. is away on a yachting trip, and the hour to strike is at hand. You will applaud the plan; it is impregnable.

"H. A."

That night sleep was long in coming to the youthful mistress of the great house. The eve of her vengeance was here; the time toward which her every thought had long set its current was winging its way softly toward her. She was not happy, she knew, but there was something higher and stronger than happiness: the feeling that through her own energy and will a wrong was to be righted, a memory avenged and a defamer brought low.

She saw Harding's grave and handsome face between her and her goal. How noble he looked, how unlike either of the men she was to play one against the other on the morrow. She knew how he would regard the *coup,* but she stifled the whisperings of conscience by the resolution that after to-morrow she would show him how grateful she was for the past. She would be free, free! She would help him as he had never been helped before; he should see that Agatha Renier could be Lady Bountiful as well as Countess Fornay. She would—.

Then came the gentle touch of sleep, and forgetfulness of all things mortal, for her dreams that night were of her mother.

Atherton arrived early next morning, smiling and immaculate. He rubbed his hands in joyful antici-

pation of the day's triumph, and, after a few of his customary compliments, he unfolded to Agatha his plan of campaign. She listened with every faculty alert.

"Now, my dear Countess," he began, "the situation at this moment is plain: we are not in control of 'United Mines,' nor is Hamilton. We have not been able to acquire the stock in the market—nor has Hamilton. We must get control to-day, if ever, for Hamilton, as I wrote you, is out of town. How shall this be done?"

Agatha shook her head slowly. Even had she known, she would not have suggested at this time. But she hung upon his words as she had never listened to a human being before. On her correct comprehension of what he should say rested immense possibilities.

"It shall be done by a stroke that will make the 'street' talk for many a month. We shall sell 'United Mines.'"

"But I thought—"

"Exactly. We shall sell—but we shall buy."

"Ah!"

The audacity of the move fascinated her. It was as clear as crystal now.

"They will be 'wash' sales, of course. My brokers have orders to pick up the stuff that my other brokers let out. After an hour or two we'll put a raft of 'United' on the market, and smash the price to smithereens. The bottom will drop out, and as Hamilton holds thousands of shares, mostly

on margin, he will be wiped out while he is on the bounding billow, and we will pick up what his brokers are forced to sell. When three o'clock comes, we shall be joint masters of 'United Mines.' Your money I shall use in buying on the break."

During this elated recital Agatha's brain had been busy with the problem she had set herself to solve. How should she outwit this man of iron nerves and unscrupulous will, and at the same time be empowered to wield the lash over Hamilton's cowering frame? By one of those sudden mental illuminations that are like the broad lighting up of a dark landscape by an electric flash, the solution came when she least expected it. The preliminary buzzing of the ticker as it ground out its repeated "ABCD" for the morning test, warned her that now, if ever, time was golden.

Under pretence of examining her memorandum books, she sat down at her desk and wrote something on a small slip of paper. Then she went to the door, opened it quickly and looked into the hall. The slip of paper went into a big jardiniere standing just outside the room, and there in a quite remarkably short time it was found by James Anderson, who read it and hurried away to another part of the house.

"I thought I heard one of the servants prowling about the door," she said as she returned. "One can never be too careful in such matters, you know."

The broker nodded approval, and picked up the tape that was now being belched forth with a regu-

larity that denoted the opening of the market. For many minutes he sat in silence, his eyes glued to the battalion of figures as they followed one another in single file from out the glass case. At last he muttered his satisfaction.

"Here's the first sale of 'United,'" he said. "A hundred shares at ninety-one. Good. It closed yesterday at ninety-two and a quarter. The game begins well, my dear lady."

For an hour or more the stock was offered in moderate quantities, and practically held its own in price, as the ticker told the two anxious watchers. As the noontide hour approached Atherton pulled out his watch.

"In a few minutes," he said grimly, "the slaughter will begin. It's the greatest joke of the season. Everybody will see my stock going to smash and pity poor Atherton. . . . Ah, see this, Five hundred 'United' at ninety—Three hundred at eighty-nine and seven-eighths—Four hundred at eighty-nine. Bravo, Countess! It won't take much of this sort of thing to hamstring our friend Hamilton. . . . Eh; what's this? Four hundred 'United' at ninety-one—Five hundred at ninety-one and three-quarters—A thousand at ninety-two. My God, what's going on?"

He whirled the telephone call convulsively and asked for his office number.

"Hello, Jones?" he said in a low voice that was tremulous with excitement. "Have I seen the boom in 'United Mines'? Certainly. No, I don't know what it means, but order everybody to pour

out all I've got of it. Flood the market, d'ye hear? Flood it!"

Then back to the ticker again, where the story of misfortune was accentuated every moment. Huge blocks of the "United Mines" were coming out, only to be snapped up with a readiness that sent the price soaring. Great beads of perspiration stood out on Atherton's forehead as he surveyed the terrible miscarriage of his plans. Then the telephone bell rang. He answered the call.

"Eh? so it will, by heavens. Order 'em all to stop selling my holdings at once."

He turned to Agatha to tell her what he had learned.

"My man says that there is some tremendous force supporting 'United,' nobody knows what. My brokers, who were not ordered to protect the stock, but to depress it, have been outbidden on the floor by the brokers of this other power. Who it can be the devil himself only knows. Hamilton is away, and I can conceive of nobody else who could possibly want the stock. Ah, that suggests something."

He pulled the long strip of paper from its basket and, beginning at the opening of the market, made a swift mental calculation of the number of shares of "United Mines" that had been sold. As he brought into the total the latest transaction in the stock, he groaned with dismay.

"Countess," he said humbly, "I have to ask your pardon for bungling one of the most promising deals I ever undertook. It is morally certain that we have lost control of the company by my stupidity in

not instructing my brokers to buy in my stock at any price if they saw any special outside demand for it. I am sorry and ashamed."

"Don't let yourself be troubled overmuch about it, Mr. Atherton," said Agatha sweetly. "Perhaps you were not so much to blame, after all."

"I fear I was. And it is too late now to recoup ourselves; we evidently cannot buy back the stock at any price from the combination that has got possession of it. If I had only put your money into 'Huronide' and the others, you would have made a handsome thing of it. See how they're booming with 'United.'"

"But I own five thousand of 'Huronide' and the others, as you call them, already."

He looked at her with admiring wonderment.

"I congratulate you, Countess," he said dryly. "You have made a neat thing by to-day's work. Perhaps if I had let you engineer the big deal, it might have resulted differently."

Confessing himself baffled by the result of the *coup,* he went down town to see if any light could be obtained in the "street," leaving Agatha to her jubilant thoughts. She felt certain that her instructions to her brokers: to buy all the "United Mines" thrown upon the market, at any price, had been obeyed to the letter. She was the power that had so mystified Atherton; she controlled the stock. The knowledge that vengeance was within her grasp, that on the morrow she had but to give the signal and Hamilton would be ruined, filled her with supreme content.

In the middle of the afternoon a note was brought to her by a servant. It had been delivered by a messenger, he said, and an answer was expected. It was from Guy Hamilton, asking if she would receive him that evening. With a thrill of triumph she wrote at the bottom of the note the single word "yes."

Although she dined alone, she dressed with an extraordinary care and beauty that somewhat astonished her usually impassive maid.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE MASK THROWN OFF

IN the early afternoon of the day of Atherton's financial discomfiture the steam yacht "Buccaneer" drew up to her dock on the East River side of the city, and her rather hilarious human freight disembarked and went their several ways. The "Buccaneer" had not been expected until the morrow, but a slight accident to her machinery made it advisable to return to port. So she limped in, and brought with her Guy Hamilton.

That gentleman was in high feather, for during the trip he had secured the promise of several financial princes that they would cooperate with him in his projected "scoop" of "United Mines" stock. A fortune and a great reputation were within his grasp. In a week he would be able to lord it over Atherton, and then—well, then for a fairer and more desirable conquest than the winning of mere dollars.

Emboldened by what seemed a foregone conclusion of success, he at last cut the rope that held him to his anchor of sobriety, the anchor that had been his salvation in the immediate past, and joined with the other guests of his millionaire host in the consumption of heroic quantities of champagne. Under

the inspiration of the choice wine, life, for Hamilton, had absolutely no obstacles to the winning of whatever prize he cared to take.

And so his thoughts turned to Agatha with a boldness they had not known since that night at the French consul's. Their relations had been cordial enough on the surface, yet there had been a constraint in her presence, like some barrier of invisible wire whose strength he felt rather than saw. But to-day his attitude changed, and great was his joy when his messenger brought back his note with the eloquent "yes" in Agatha's handwriting.

The Countess received him in the library with a graciousness that put to flight any lingering embarrassment he might have felt. She was a vision of beauty in her Worth gown of black lace and jet, and he would have given half his anticipated fortune to fold her at once in his arms. He came in like a conqueror, and she noticed the change in his demeanor before he had walked halfway across the room.

"Did you think it strange that I should have written for permission to call to-night?" he asked sentimentally.

"Why, no," she replied gaily, "of course not. It's quite customary, isn't it?"

"But not between old friends," he replied with an air of assurance that roused her spirit immediately. Was it possible that he, of all men, had lost his memory?

"I knew you would take an interest in what I have done to-day," he continued. "I have been

with the kings of Wall Street. I have won them to my side completely. They listened to me, Agatha, —think of it, to me—as if I were one of them. I shall be soon, for everything is fighting for me. All I need is inspiration."

She smiled in supreme contempt at his meaning, which was clear enough to her woman's wit. Blinded by passion and the vinous excesses of the day, he mistook the smile for something else.

"Ah, you see my meaning," he went on rapidly. "You will let the past rest in its forgotten grave? The present is for us two together. We can conquer the world, I of finance and you of society. I love you, Agatha, I have always loved you. I want you to be my wife. I am at your feet; trample me, if you will, but keep me near you."

The girl turned her head to hide for the moment the triumph that glowed richly in her face. It was the act of modesty, hesitation, yielding, he thought. He seized her hands and clasped them warmly.

"Ah, Agatha, dear," he cried wildly, "surely you will not keep me in suspense. Tell me—"

"Tell you," she echoed, tearing her hands from his grasp and facing him in a sort of fury. "You offer me yourself and your—fortune. You yourself have claims, of course, for you have said it! But your fortune—what of that?"

In bewilderment he began a disconnected recital of his present position and his hopes for the future. She cut him short with scornful words.

"But the price? You are to buy, and I am to sell.

I must know the terms. How much do you bid? What is your cash offer for my hand?"

Scarcely believing his ears, absolutely unable to judge whether this were the height of bitter sarcasm or a cold-blooded proposition from an ambitious woman of the world, Hamilton blundered on.

"I am on the verge of a great *coup* in stocks," he said at last.

"A *coup?*" exclaimed the girl contemptuously. "One has been made to-day while you were wining and dining. Look there!"

She threw aside a magnificent Japanese screen with a swift movement and there, silent but with its mass of paper still clinging to its maw, stood the ticker of the New York Stock Exchange. He looked at it dully for a moment, and then into her face. Something he saw there chilled his easy confidence into dread.

"I—I haven't seen the tape for two days," he said vaguely. "What is it you mean? And what's that ticker doing here?"

"See for yourself," she replied coldly, pointing to the tape. He whirled the writhing mass out of the basket, and began at the opening quotations. He frowned angrily at the innocent figures.

"A break in 'United Mines,' eh? Worse; a slump, a pounding. Who on earth has been at us? If I had only been here! And what the deuce is the meaning of it? The market is strong enough. It's a raid on me. Can Atherton?—no, he's too thick-headed, too business-like."

He passed the long strip swiftly through his fingers, noting with adept eye the prices of his specialty as they glided by. Then exultation took the place of anxiety.

"Ah, she strengthens! They didn't have it their own way—That's it, up it goes. Somebody is fighting for us, as I should have done. Magnificent! It closes at ninety-five. I see—Atherton was to the rescue, and routed the bears. To-morrow we shall win the fight."

"To-morrow you will be a ruined man," said Agatha solemnly.

"Nonsense! I tell you they can't beat me. Doesn't to-day's battle show it?"

"Nevertheless, you are on the brink of a great catastrophe," she insisted gravely.

He tried to gain some light from her face, but its impassiveness baffled him. Then the significance of the paraphernalia of the market in this room began to dawn upon him.

"What do you mean?" he cried hoarsely. "What do you know?" He seized her roughly by the wrist, and again demanded: "What do you know?"

"I know that every dollar you have is locked up in 'United Mines' and the smaller companies forming it. I know, too, that you are holding these shares on margin. Well, you will never see a penny of your money again."

"You talk like an insane woman," he said sulkily, "and I'm half inclined to believe you are.

Didn't you see how Atherton supported the stock to-day?"

"You quite misapprehend the situation, Mr. Hamilton. Atherton did not save you. He did not, he could not, buy those stocks."

"But someone—"

"Yes, someone, of course. That someone was myself. The stocks are mine, mine. Do you understand, or must I repeat it: *mine!*"

"You—bought—them?" he stammered, completely overwhelmed by the astonishing revelation. This, then, was the end—to be a plaything in the hands of a woman, to have to cringe to one he once treated with such cavalier loftiness. It was too monstrous to believe, and incredulity began to show itself on his face.

Agatha hurriedly reviewed the steps of the campaign that was to have ruined him in any event. Her thorough understanding of the scheme, her complete knowledge of his own most secret plans, made her appear to his distorted imagination like some handsome witch who could read his own thoughts. He was terrified now, and disposed to plead, in the faint hope that her hand might be stayed.

"For God's sake, Agatha," he whimpered, "what—what made you do this?"

"Because I hated you," she said bitterly, "because I have hated you for five years. I hated you when you insulted me beneath your aunt's roof. I hated you more intensely when my grandfather went

to his death, the victim of a slander caused by you. My hate grew daily, hourly, in the years in Paris. When I gazed at the picture of my dear mother, instead of peace her features brought storm, for they recalled the insults that, because of your unmanliness, were heaped upon her grave by your scandalizing set."

"I—I surely had no share in that," he pleaded, but she went on without heed.

"Your theft from one who had befriended and loved you till you proved too base for respect, increased my hatred. But I despised you most when you came in the day of my prosperity and fawned upon me, and cringed to me from the depths of your degradation, for then you proved yourself a fool as well as a knave."

He shrank, as one would shrink from the lash of a whip, under her lacerating contempt.

"Now you are on the verge of ruin, and I have done it. I control your boasted company. I can depose you from its presidency, and make your margin-held shares your undoing if I choose. Tomorrow the whole world shall know that your attempt to make of yourself a king, you who are not fit for a king's fool, was balked by a woman. Now go, you cur!"

There was no appeal, he knew, as he looked at the stern determination on her countenance. Baffled, beaten, humiliated, he walked slowly toward the door. Then he turned with a sudden blaze of wrath.

"This is not your work," he exclaimed, "you

couldn't do it. That sniveling Harding put you up to it. I'll—I'll wring his neck, d—— him."

"As you did the night he would have resented your insult to me, had not a humbler man saved him from physical contamination by use of a horsewhip," she retorted.

Hamilton's wine-flushed face became purple with anger, and his fists clenched as if he would have annihilated her, woman though she was.

"Take care," he shouted, "neither one is here to defend you now." And he rushed toward her as she stood with her back to the wall in an attitude of splendid defiance. Her very beauty, heightened by the excitement, exasperated and maddened him.

"Be careful," she said icily, "you are observed. Well, Pierre?"

"Mad'moiselle rang?" asked the well trained servant impassively, although he had witnessed a portion of the surprising scene.

"Yes, Pierre. This—gentleman has seen fit to insult your mistress. Show him the door."

The tall and powerful Frenchman placed a hand on Guy's shoulder and gripped it as with a clasp of iron. The furious man attempted to shake the servant off, but to no avail, and he was forced from the room and into the hall, cursing and biting his lips in impotent fury. Then the one-time favorite of Old Chetford's aristocracy, the would-be monarch of finance, was thrust into the street like some vile intruder.

No sooner had the shutting of the outer door announced Hamilton's expulsion than the strength of

bitterness that had sustained Agatha deserted her, and a violent reaction set in. Trembling in limb and faint at heart she hurried to her chamber. She took from its satinwood box the miniature of her mother and pressed it to her lips. Falling upon her knees by the bedside, she held the picture in her outstretched hands and gazed at the sweet and childlike face as if she would call it back to life.

"Have I done right? Are you satisfied with your child?" she asked.

Then overtaxed nature bent beneath its burden, and the girl slipped away into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A NEW DAWN

AGATHA'S' apparently lifeless body was found by her maid, who had come to the chamber to announce a caller. The girl was a self-possessed little thing, and she neither screamed nor rushed in a panic for help. Instead, she applied a crystal of smelling-salts, and forced some cold water between her mistress' teeth. She was soon delighted to note signs of returning consciousness, and in a few moments more Agatha rose mechanically to her feet.

She looked blankly about, when the gold locket, its lovely occupant gazing into her face, caught her eye, and brought back the passionate scene through which she had just passed, with tumultuous vividness.

She sighed wearily. Oh, for rest, for peace, for oblivion! Were all victories in the world bought at such terrible price? Did the fruit of triumph always turn to ashes on the lip? Then why struggle on, to be buffeted by fate, even in one's hour of exultation? She felt that sleep might, perhaps, be persuaded to spread its gentle wing over her, and she asked her maid to get her ready for bed, early as it was.

"But, Mad'moiselle," said the little servant, "I came all on ze purposs to tell you zat a caller is for you down-stairs."

"A caller, Jeannette? Who?"

"It is ze curé, ze—what you call meenestaire, Monsieur Harding."

In some magical way—she did not then understand how—all of Agatha's weariness and despondency vanished at the sound of that name. In their place came a throbbing of the heart that filled her with nervous energy. She dispatched her maid to make excuses for her delay, and began to tear off her beautiful gown as if every second were of priceless value. She chose from her wardrobe a simple dress, reddish in tone, and took the diamond ornaments from her hair.

Harding had come to the house in response to an urgent telephone message from James Anderson. "You are needed at —— Fifth Avenue," it said, and the minister rejoiced, even in his foreboding, for he felt that the time had come when he could take a positive position and stake his all on one final cast of the die. His heart swelled with thanksgiving as he saw from the faces and bearing of the servants that no outward harm, at least, had come to his beloved.

And when she appeared before him at last, clad with a beautiful simplicity he had not seen since the old days on the "Hill," when he was teacher and she his pupil, his intuition told him of some spiritual change for the better. By a queer turn of memory the color of her dress recalled that day in the mill

yard at Old Chetford, when he had seen her pinning up the rent in her scarlet skirt, an enticing vision of young girlhood. He had asked himself, he remembered, what her future would be, and all had been a mystery, a simple guessing at the potentialities of woman and her environment. Was he any more certain now what would become of her? From the depths of his most secret consciousness came the glad "yes," so full and strong that it almost took form upon his lips. She was to be saved from that most relentless of enemies—self. His old prophetic feeling, the Hebraic spirit that three or four times in his life had filled his soul with conviction, was again upon him.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Harding."

He started as from a revery, and took the hand so cordially extended. He noticed a little trembling of the fingers that lingered in his own a moment longer than might have been absolutely necessary. And the eyes, around which he had so often noted dark circles of late, bore signs of tears. James Anderson had grasped the situation; he *was* needed.

"I am very glad to be here, Agatha," he said.

The familiar name struck upon her ears like a chord of beautiful music. Of late he had not used it; indeed,—the thought all at once came to her—he had omitted all manner of naming her in direct conversation, except that once he had called her "Countess," which had, in a certain sense, wounded her, she could not tell why. Now the old name, fraught with cherished memories, was most pleasant.

As part and parcel of her softer mood came a

strange sense of weakness, a hunger for human sympathy. Oh, for an hour of Mrs. Copeland or her grandfather! How easily she could become a girl again under their loving shelter. Yet here—and she thrilled with the swift realization—was their legitimate successor, the true and faithful link between her present and past. Had Harding known the tenderness of her musings, he would not have interrupted them, even for the words of sympathy that he delicately expressed.

"I fear you are not quite yourself, Agatha"—again that dear name—"you look weary, and, if I may be pardoned, ill."

"I am ill," she replied passionately, "ill at heart, sick of the cruelties of the world, the world's wrongs. So sick, and so tired."

Tears flooded her eyes, tears that were more womanly than she had shed since the loss of her benefactress.

Harding would gladly have soothed the girl with the caress that his whole being cried out, "give, give," but before his own impulses he put a practical desire for her welfare. First must the body and the brain be restored to health, and the heart—ah, if ever the time came for him to minister to that, he would know what to do.

"Agatha," he said with gentle insistence, "the time has come for you to break from the stifling influences of the life you lead in this house, if you wish to really live. Go out into the country. Breathe God's fresh air, with his green carpet beneath your feet and his blue sky over your head. Try that

beautiful life for a while, and your cheek will glow and your heart warm with nature's own humanity."

The fervor of his words fitted her mood, the charm of the picture appealed to her fancy.

"Yes, when I have done my work. To-morrow sees the beginning of the end," she exclaimed, starting up suddenly and pacing the room with nervous tread. "To-morrow he will be crushed, crushed under the weight of my revenge."

Harding did not ask who was thus to be punished; he knew too well whom she meant.

"He was here to-night."

"Here?" exclaimed Harding, his instinct telling him that the man's presence was intimately connected with Agatha's great mental upheaval. He loathed the fellow now; in fact he dared not think that he did not hate him.

"Yes, and I warned him what the morrow would bring forth; that he would be ruined, discredited, and that I alone was responsible."

"*You* would ruin *him?* How?" he asked in surprise.

Walking up and down before him, her clasped hands swaying curiously in rhythm with her step, and her dark eyes glowing with the ardor of a wild thing spying out its prey, she told him in somewhat incoherent fashion the story of her financial victory and the situation into which she had forced Hamilton.

"And what of your conscience?" he ventured, as she finished her remarkable story, "does it approve?"

"Perfectly. What claim has that man for consideration? For the second time in his life he tried to force his so-called love upon me. This time I was not defenceless, and I had him kicked from the house by a servant."

All the man within the minister's stalwart body rose up in a great thrill of joy at this reference to the past, coupled as it was to her present attitude. Then there had never been any affection for Hamilton! The thought was a subtle intoxication. And yet the peril to Agatha was as vital as ever.

She stopped her measured walk, and faced him as if in defiance.

"You speak of conscience," she cried. "Would it be worthy of the name if it did not approve what I am doing? His sins against me I could forgive, perhaps, but his sins against the dead are pardonless. You are an honest man; tell me, does he not merit a far greater punishment than I can inflict?"

"His evil has been great; the punishment is trivial. It is not of him that I am thinking, but of you."

"Of me? Am I worth considering at such a crisis, when the memory of those he made wretched cries for vengeance?"

"Ah, Agatha, but does it? Mrs. Copeland, your grandfather, your mother—would they wish it? Would they wish to see the girl they loved transformed by hate into a vindictive woman? Would they be happy to see your nature hardening under the stress of a revenge cherished for years, and feeding upon your better self to its ultimate de-

struction. Would they approve of injuring the innocent—the minor holders of this stock that is your weapon—to punish the guilty?"

"I do not know. I only know that I cannot forget, I cannot forgive."

"I admit your great wrongs. I frame no excuse for this man's brutality. It is for you I plead. Forgiveness is the greatest of the virtues, for it is the most difficult to practice. It is the most noble, for it is the most ennobling."

"My wrongs—their wrongs. You forget them!" she cried with an intensity that touched him deeply.

"No," he replied gently, "nor did He whose forgiveness is the beacon to us all, forget. He remembered, but He forgave."

"He was not mortal," she whispered. Then she looked him full in the eyes and added: "You, yourself, could not forgive."

"Couldn't I?" he asked with a sad smile. "I *have* forgiven. It was a great burden that sorely tried me, but I forgave him years ago."

"Hamilton?"

"Yes."

"What had *you* to forgive?" she queried, her eyes filled with questioning.

"The greatest thing he could have done to injure me," he answered gravely.

"To injure you? How could he injure *you?*"

"By injuring you," he said gently.

"By injuring *me?* I—I don't understand."

"Yes, Agatha, by injuring you." He spoke rapidly now, and with a vehemence she had never before

heard from his lips. "Yes, for I loved you, loved you then as I—as I love you now."

"*You—love—me?*"

She stood before him in adorable wonderment, her head bent forward toward his own, her lips parted and her eyes filled with a soft radiance.

His long repressed ardor burst forth in a torrent of tender words, a storm of passionate phrases that would not be denied. Never had he pleaded for a soul more eloquently than for the cause of his own manly heart, nor ever had he a more entranced listener. And yet—

"Why have you not—told me this before? Why did you not tell me—then?"

"I did not speak then," he answered gently, "because you were in distress and scarcely more than a child. I could not try to force myself into your heart, for—pardon me, dear, I did not know everything then as since—I feared that the heart Guy Hamilton wounded so deeply held some tenderness for him."

"And yet you would have thrashed him that night at the club," said Agatha, the sunlight dancing into her eyes through the mist of recent tears.

Whose was the face that Harding saw with surprise before him? It was strange, yet familiar. The years had rolled backward; there was no more a Countess Fornay; the Agatha Renier of old stood there in masquerade in another's brilliant drawing-room. And, most wondrous of all, the hard lines had vanished from her face and the benison of peace seemed to have descended upon her.

"You knew that?" he could only ejaculate, filled as he was by the joy of his discovery.

"Your good ally, James Anderson, told me all about it in Paris. The fragments of the whip he used are among my dearest treasures. Often as I looked at them I have thought of the strong arms—your arms—that were ready to protect me then—"

"And ever have been, dear, and are now and always shall be, if—"

"There are no 'ifs,'" she broke in impetuously, "at least," she added, blushing divinely, "none that *I* can offer."

"My darling, do you know what that means?"

"Why should I not when I—Oh, Ralph, my dear, must I say it aloud?"

"No, sweetheart; there is another way—"

And that other way she chose—the way of loving womankind since the world began, the way of the heart's silent eloquence, of fire and dew, of fulfilment and promise. Clasped in his strong and loyal arms the burden of her earthly struggles slipped away, and the glorified portals of a new life were opened wide for her willing feet.

* * * * * *

With Agatha's love came implicit faith, and she relied upon Harding's counsel to determine her action in the matter of the stock transaction. At his advice she wrote to her various brokers, countermanding her orders of the afternoon, and left her further course to his judgment. It was not that her

scheme of vengeance had yielded to her new-found happiness; that would have been merely the exchange of one passion for another. No, she knew that there had been a new dawn, and that her love was but one of its radiant beams. Her soul, long buried in the ashes of morbid retrospection, had been awakened to life and beauty, and she saw a new heaven and a new earth.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A DEBT IS PAID

HARDING went directly from the scene of his life's profoundest joy to the Realists' Club, there to arrange for the forwarding of the notes of instruction to Agatha's brokers as soon as their places of business should be open in the morning.

The happiness in his heart must have found expression on his face, for some of his club acquaintances noted and commented on his appearance. "Satan" Montgomery sauntered up to the desk where the minister had seated himself to write, and attempted to rally him upon his altered looks.

"I say, Harding," he began jovially, rolling a cigarette of Egyptian tobacco, for which accomplishment he had a great reputation, "you look radiant, positively. Quite a change, in fact, from the down-in-the-mouth face you've been wearing around the club lately. Have you at last knocked the devil out for good and all in your prize-fight with sin?"

The minister was too full of his new delight to take offence at this flippant familiarity.

"Well, not exactly. But I may have exorcised one evil spirit, and that's a good deal, isn't it?"

"Bah! Let's have a whack at the billiard-balls, old man. I want revenge."

"Not to-night, Montgomery. I have other things to think about."

And, in fact, he had. For him there was the overwhelming knowledge of Agatha's love, for which his being had hungered these many years. But beyond even that, to his stern integrity, was the blessed thought that the beacon light he had tended so long and so lovingly had been seen, and the peril of the reef averted. Now he could rest from his ceaseless vigil, and the realization brought him unutterable peace.

He knew that the desire of the high-minded girl for the rehabilitation of her mother and herself in Old Chetford was pure and worthy, and he rejoiced that it could be realized without any of the spectacular effects she had planned. As his wife—"his wife!" how the words thrilled him—she would command respect, and her fine gifts and finer nature would soon win for her the loyal affection of all who were worth while. He would not have felt it unwarranted had he choked a public confession of his deceit and dishonor from Hamilton, but that, he realized, would only set new tongues wagging. No! Over the obliterated grave of the dead scandal his wife should erect a new temple of truth that would do her honor evermore.

But what should be the man's punishment? He could not conjecture, but he felt a great certainty that in some way fate would exact a reparation. He had no patience with the doctrine that the wicked

flourish upon earth more than do the good, nor did he care to leave to the hereafter the complete condemnation of the scoundrel.

The ending of the stock transaction, which relieved Agatha from the sullying presence of Hamilton forever, suggested that something was to be done to save the innocent persons who would be involved by any sudden turning of "United Mines" upon the market. He determined that from the plans of hatred and revenge should spring great good. So he wrote to a broker of his acquaintance, a man he knew to be honest, asking him for an appointment on the following day, when the control of the stocks should be handed over to him for such disposition as his well-regulated conservatism should think best. That done, the road of happiness would be clear, and then for the new life in the old, familiar place that his imagination even now pictured smiling in the vernal beauty of early summer.

He had sealed his letter to the broker, and was addressing it, when the sound of loud voices attracted his attention. He saw a little knot of men just outside the library, standing near the marble stairs that led to the floor below. Prominent among the men was the tall frame of Hamilton, and, as the crowd parted a little, he could make out the fat, admirably dressed figure of Horatio Atherton.

Undoubtedly there was violent talk between the two, but Harding could not at first distinguish their words. Could the double-dealing in stocks be known to Hamilton, he wondered. In that case there was a possibility that Agatha's name might be dragged

into the quarrel. He arose hastily, armed with a new feeling of responsibility, and walked toward the group of excited men.

"I tell you, Hamilton, you're drunk," Atherton was saying with his utmost suavity. "I hate a drunken man, and I won't dispute with you."

"Well, you can hate and be ——. You've got to hear what I've got to say. I tell you you tried to cheat me."

The minister's teeth set hard, and his limbs stiffened instinctively. He dreaded, but was ready for the next word.

"Hamilton, you're a fool. Go to bed, and you'll apologize in the morning," said Atherton coolly, lighting one of his black cigars. "Easy, now, easy," he remarked, with a blandness that maddened Hamilton, as the latter started forward, his fists clenched and his lips babbling unintelligible threats.

The drink-crazed man was seized and pinioned by some of the clubmen as he lunged viciously at Atherton, who merely laughed and blew a cloud of smoke into Hamilton's face.

"Let me go," shrieked the struggling Guy. "I tell you he took that third ace out of his discards. I saw him do it, d—— him."

A great weight lifted itself from Harding's soul. The disgraceful row had no stronger basis than a quarrel over a gambling game. He prepared to go home, giving a servant instructions as to the sending of the letters early in the morning.

"Good night, gentlemen," said Atherton amiably, and stepped down the marble stairs.

At this vanishing sight of the object of his wrath, Hamilton, by a tremendous effort, broke away from his captors, and started for the stairs, reeling as he went.

"Look out for him, or he'll fall," cried Harding sharply, and several of the men sprang forward in alarm. Guy turned, half-facing them, with a leer of drunken self-confidence.

"Don't you worry 'bout me, you fellers," he hiccoughed with a foolish smile. "I'm all right; I'm always all—"

The boastful words were silenced on his lips, as he wavered wildly on the top step, swinging his arms frantically about in the vain attempt to clutch something for support. Then he fell headlong down the stairs to the marble floor below, just brushing the descending figure of Atherton as he went.

A cry of dismay came from some of Hamilton's friends, but above all was the high-pitched, sarcastic voice of "Satan" Montgomery trying to reassure everybody.

"Drunken men and fools never get hurt, fellows," he said. "He's all right, I dare say."

But when they went down and lifted the inert and unconscious mass, they knew well that the old adage had failed terribly.

With white faces they bore him to one of the chambers, and placed him, dressed as he was, on one of the club's immaculate beds. Spasmodic moans

and an occasional heaving of the chest were all that spoke of life within him. His fair hair was streaked with blood, and his handsome face was the color of death.

A medical member of the club who had dropped in after a late emergency call, applied restoratives and tried to make the sufferer comfortable. Then he spent a long time in careful examination of the injuries.

"Well, Doctor?" asked Harding, as the physician came from the room at last. The answer burned into his brain indelibly.

"No bones are broken. The shock was great, but the inertness of the fall prevented fracture. He will live, but the injury to his spine is permanent. He will never speak or have the power of motion again. God knows, it would be better if he were not to think, as well."

Harding left the club with a strange conviction of the unreality of everything. He was like a man under the influence of some powerful drug that takes all substance from the surrounding world. The long, almost unearthly battle for Agatha's soul, culminating in his triumph and the winning of her heart as well, together with the tragedy he had just witnessed, was too heavy a burden for his emotions. As he paced slowly along to his lodgings every sound in the streets—the whirr of cars, the rattle of belated carriages, the boisterous laughter of revelers—all seemed to reiterate in varied measure:

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

* * * * * *

Agatha heard of the terrible visitation upon Hamilton with a horror in which, Harding was thankful to see, was also pity. The retribution that had overtaken him was so terrible in comparison with her own puny scheme of revenge that, as in the case of Mrs. Worth-Courtleigh, she felt how weak were human plans of vengeance by the side of the awful decrees of fate.

In a short time the disposal of all of Agatha's stock ventures was arranged. A new and conservative element was put in control of "United Mines," and the "corner" in the smaller companies, so cleverly planned by Atherton, was never accomplished. That wily financier, learning how she had outwitted him in the deal, admired the Countess more than ever. But, on coming up to the brownstone house to express that admiration and incidentally ask for her hand, he had received a curt dismissal and the assurance that their business relations were at an end. This he accepted with his usual stolidity, although he was bitterly disappointed. Those who knew him well found him nervously irritable for a few days. Then it was over; he had simply lost another *coup*.

No slave ever released from bondage was more glad than was Agatha in handing over to Harding the complete management of her business affairs. She was tired of struggling, happy to have someone to act for her. So he arranged that all her holdings should be sold gradually and profitably.

A large sum of money was realized, but she did not wish to touch a penny of it. After much pleasant planning they decided to use it for the endowment of a hospital where curious and extreme cases of suffering could be treated. Harding knew that the need for hospitals is never fully met, and the institution that he proposed, and to the conducting of which he decided to devote a part of his future career, should minister to those poor sufferers whose misfortunes were likely to take them from hospital to almshouse.

In due time the "Sarah Copeland Hospital" was built upon the beautiful banks of the Hudson above the city. The first ambulance to enter its gateway, after the building was in readiness for the reception of patients, brought to the home of mercy the nerveless body of Guy Hamilton, whose ever-busy brain found perpetual food for wonder at the sweetness and nobility of a charity that could pardon the evil that he had done.

CHAPTER XL

INTO SAFE HARBOR

THE glow of a fair June sunset was fading into the shadows of night as a little group of men and women paced slowly up and down the platform of the Old Chetford railroad station, awaiting the arrival of the evening train. One of their number, a sturdy, well-made man, was distinguished from the rest by a faster tread and a more nervous manner. He consulted his watch frequently, and at last walked to the little grated window behind which sat the telegraph operator.

"Is the train on time, Harkins?" he asked of the thin-faced young man who was busily writing an in-coming message.

"To a dot, Mr. Harding. She ought to be here in thirty-five seconds. There she whistles now."

Harding looked toward the north. Far up the track was the faint gleam of the locomotive headlight, like a pale star of evening. To him it was a star, a star of hope and love and happiness, for behind it was his dearest possession, the sweetest thing the world held. What if she should not come! His heart chilled at the mere anticipation of that most depressing of all experiences—to await the arrival of a loved one who does not appear.

But now the train was at his side, and in a moment down stepped Agatha to greet him, smiling, happy and beautiful. As he clasped both her hands passionately in his, he was sure that no such queen of women had ever come to Old Chetford before. And come to him! He could have cried aloud for joy. He wondered why all the others in the station did not insist on knowing his right to this vision of loveliness, this highbred lady who was so glad to see him. As a matter of fact, the rest were too busy welcoming their own special arrivals to pay much attention to him and his. Only a few noticed the pretty woman whose hands the minister seemed unwilling to relinquish, and not one of them dreamed of connecting her with Agatha Renier.

As they rolled along in the ponderous "hack" Harding had engaged, they had time for a more intimate greeting, not of words but deeds. That having been accomplished to Harding's satisfaction and Agatha's rather rueful examination of her pretty hair, they talked of their coming marriage and their home.

"Is everything settled in the old house, dear?" she asked.

"Perfectly. Mrs. Brown is a treasure, as I had reason to know years ago. And best of all Worth-Courtleigh bid in a great deal of the Copeland furniture, and I have got it back again. And you? Did your breaking up go smoothly?"

"Oh, yes. I transferred the lease without a hitch, and salved the pain of the servants with good, round gratuities. They went away almost happy,

all except Pierre; do you know, Ralph, I actually think I caught him crying."

"Don't blame him, sweetheart. I should do the same if I had to part with you."

"Silly fellow! As if you ever would. N-o-o-o, dearest, no; my hat remember."

As they rode along to the southward, Agatha was too happy and too preoccupied to note the direction of their journey. It was not until the driver stopped and opened the creaking carriage door that she realized that the "Hill" had not been their destination. She caught the faint fragrance of the salt air as she stepped out upon planking that had a familiar ring, and, looking through the gathering gloom, she perceived the outline of a wharf. There, at its left, lay the dark hulk of a ship.

"The 'Harpoon,'" she cried gaily, clapping her hands with delight. "Then it's not broken up." And she gave her lover's arm an impetuous squeeze that he thought would have been full payment for five times five years of anxiety, and which made the fat and ruddy face of the "hack" driver curl into one tremendous smile which he tried in vain to hide. That smile became a fixture for the evening when he saw that the bill which Harding, with exuberant force, pressed into his hand, bore the potent "X" in its corner. He received his orders to wait until he was wanted again with the utmost composure.

"So you brought me to see it," said Agatha tenderly, "and couldn't even wait till daylight. The dear old 'Harpoon.' Poor grandfather!"

But sorrow could not linger at such a time, and

her voice rang forth again with an infectious heartiness that warmed Harding's heart:

"But what are those lights?" She raised her veil. "And who are those people?"

"Come and see."

Harding drew her arm through his, and they quickly walked down the wharf. Suddenly a vociferous cheer sounded on the soft night air.

"Why, it's Captain Sykes and Artemas and Hank and—and—"

Stealing a sidelong glance at the woman by his side, Harding saw that her eyes were filled with tears, the tears of memory and of happy home-coming. For that tender mist he loved her more than ever.

As they neared the staunch old "Harpoon's" side, the cheering from the deck was redoubled, and hats were swung into the air. Agatha now made out James Anderson and Tilly Donelson and a dark-eyed, curly-haired girl whose face suggested remembrance but not present recognition. Then there were some of her old-time mill friends, and—could it be? Yes, it surely was Nelly Nevins with a big, broad-shouldered young man who seemed to take a peculiarly affectionate interest in all that appertained to her, and smiled whenever she did. For Nelly Nevins was "Nevins" no longer, but a matron of nearly a year's experience who deemed herself thoroughly fitted to bestow advice on the alluring subject of matrimony.

"Oh dear," sighed Agatha happily, with a gentle

pressure of Harding's arm, "isn't it delightful to be welcomed by hearts that really love you?"

For answer there was another resounding cheer, with shouts of "Hooroar fer Miss Aggy," after which the Three Musketeers of Tuckerman's wharf stepped from the ranks by virtue of seniority and "guardeenship," and hurried forward to embrace the lovely woman who was, and ever would be, to them a petted child. With smiles and tears she returned in kind the greeting of these loyal souls.

"An' now, Miss Aggy," bellowed Sykes, evidently on the point of bursting with some tremendous secret, "do ye see anythin' unusual, an', ye might say, extra-ord'nary around here. Do ye, or don't ye? Come now."

"Why, yes, of course, Captain. All this crowd, the lights—"

"The lights! Ho, ho, ho," shouted Sykes, his rotund figure shaken with laughter, "that's jest a fact, the lights. But what's the lights around, Miss Aggy? I arsks yer that."

Then did Agatha, at Harding's prompting, look up at the blaze of lanterns which surrounded a framework over the gang-plank of the ship. And there, within the gaily illuminated rectangle, she read, in bright gilt letters:—

STEWART MUSEUM OF THE SEA.

"O-o-oh!" gasped Agatha delightedly, "how splendid! But who—what—I don't quite understand."

"Your wedding gift to the people you love, dear," whispered Harding.

"But I thought the 'Harpoon' was sold when—"

"It undoubtedly was, and I bought it. I have kept it all these years, and, with the help of some good people, I have made of it what you see."

"'Hank Donelson, Custodian,' at your werry best sarvice, Miss Aggy," said the little tar who owned the name, and who now rejoiced in a marvelous suit of blue broadcloth trimmed with gold braid, as well as a jaunty cap bearing the title of his exalted office. "Hours from ten to four but don't ye mind that, 'cause ye knows as how ye're welcome at whatsomever time ye wants ter light up the ol' ship with yer pooty face."

"Thank you, Hank," returned Agatha with a laugh. "I assure you that I appreciate the special privilege. I shall not abuse it."

Then they went aboard, and Agatha kissed Nelly, who had been "Nevins," and shook hands cordially with all the others who were good to her in the old days. Among the last to approach was the dark-eyed girl whose face had seemed familiar.

"How do you do, ma'am?" she said somewhat timidly, "I don't believe you know me, do you?"

Agatha looked at the pale, pretty face, and something stirred in her memory; but still recognition refused to come.

"No, you don't," continued the girl, "how

should you? But do you remember the 'little mite'—that's what you called me—who got in your way in the St. Agnes vestry one evening long ago?"

"Ah, yes; and she wanted to give me her toys, the warm-hearted little thing. Your name is—"

"Susy; Susy Brent."

"And are you still in the mill?"

"Oh, dear, no, ma'am. I've been to school almost ever since, and now I'm a typewriter in the counting-room. Ma says I'm too nice for her any more, and I guess I am, 'cause she drinks pretty bad nowadays. *I'm* going to *be* somebody."

"I'm sure you are, Susy," returned Agatha kindly, "and you may count on me to help you."

Then came Tilly, her angular face lighted with real pleasure, and her thin hand working Agatha's plump one as if it had been a pump-handle.

"Wall, Aggy Renier, ef ye ain't jest a splendid critter, then I never see one. I knew ye'd come back some day an' show 'em. But air ye jest as full o' them foolish notions o' love as ever?"

"You must ask Ra—Mr. Harding about that," said the girl, blushing divinely. And he, catching the look in her eyes, vowed that all his previous happiness was as nothing compared with the bliss of this moment.

Then they made their triumphal progress down the companionway to the cabin, where another surprise was in readiness. The bunks had been removed, and in their place were handsome cases filled with shells, corals, marine plants and a thousand rare and beautiful treasures of the ocean. In the

center, where, around the long table, the old salts had once made merry, was a great aquarium, in which swam many curious fishes and amphibians. The old place was brilliant with new lights and handsome with appropriate decorations. And there in the rear was Agatha's little cabin, looking just as it did when she had left it years ago for a grander but not a happier abiding-place. Only, over the door, worked out in lustrous little sea-shells, was the legend "MISS PETTICOATS." She learned afterward that it was the work of Hank, but why he had placed it there she could never find out. He would only say that he "kinder wanted it 'round."

The rushing in of old emotions, old memories, unsteadied the girl for the moment. The vision of the gentle sailor who had loved her as the core of his own heart filled her with tender melancholy. The ship whispered of his dear presence, and she could almost feel his blessing descending in this hour of her supreme happiness. For she was happy; the dreamy tinge of sadness, the half-suggested ache of regret, only intensified her present peace and joy.

In that hallowed spot they were married. To Agatha it seemed neither a strange nor an unusual thing when Harding brought forward a self-evident clergyman, whom he introduced as a college classmate who had come from a far-distant city to perform their marriage ceremony. Indeed, she would not have had it otherwise, for here every association was of purity and honor and truth, and those who surrounded her and wished her every joy in life were of the tested metal that makes humanity's armor strong.

Captain Sykes, resplendent in a new " frock-suit," gave Agatha away with an impressive air that excited the envy of his two associates. But they, in turn, had their revenge by being the first to kiss the bride. Then, when the storm of hearty congratulations was over, and good-nights said, they all united in throwing such immense quantities of rice and so many pairs of formidable boots after the carriage that the fat driver whipped up his sleepy horses to escape the storm. Thus the wedded pair rode away into their new world, the grace and tenderness of the woman resting within the strength and loyalty of the man.

After the guests had gone, Hank went slowly around the ship putting out the lights and tidying up. There was no sound save the gentle lapping of the water against the " Harpoon's " sides, and no light nearer than that of the island beacon in the harbor. The brooding calm of the summer night enfolded the sailor in its soft arms, and he moved as in a dream. At last he found himself before the door of the spotless little cabin that was once Agatha Renier's. He looked long and lovingly at an old-time photograph of the girl that he had fastened upon the wall. Then his odd little smile illumined his face.

" Good-night, and God love ye, dear little gal," he said. " Ye've had a stormy v'yge an' come nigh ter shipwreck, but thanks be ter the great Pilot ye're in a safe harbor at last."

THE END

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